STEPHEN STILLS: CSNY, HENDRIX & ME

UNCUT

75TH BIRTHDAY SPECIAL

"HIS EYES WERE OPENED..."

THE FAR-OUT ADVENTURES OF

NICK DRAKE

124 REVIEWS!
PAUL SIMON
LLOYD COLE
T.REX
+ MORE!

THE STONES
NICK BROOMFIELD INVESTIGATES

EVAN DANDO
"SO MANY CATACLYSMS!"

JULIAN COPE
"RULE NOTHING OUT!"

NEW YORK DOLLS
BY DAVID JOHANSEN

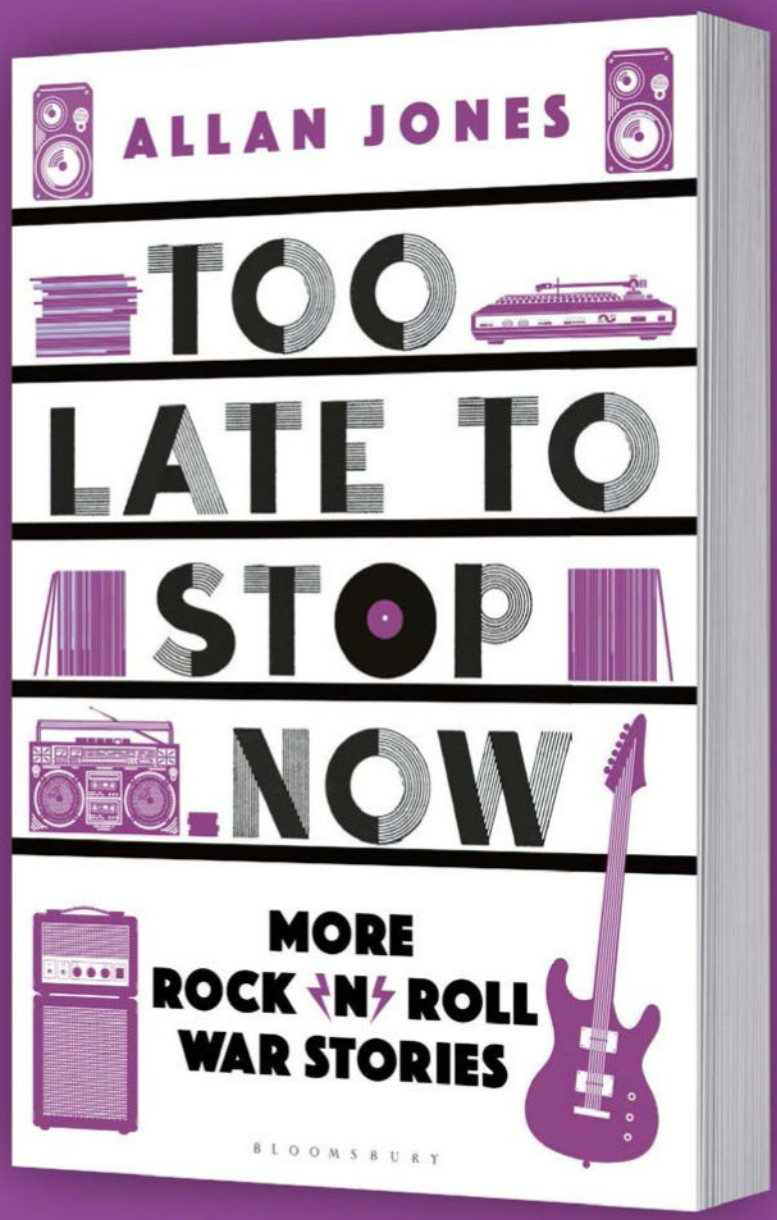
MARK STEWART
REMEMBERED

ON THE ROAD WITH
DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS

...AND INTRODUCING
KASSI VALAZZA

PLUS!
ALAN SPARHAWK
FLOWERED UP
THE BANGLES
DE LA SOUL
JONNY GREENWOOD

Extravagant behaviour and outrageous deeds



These are epic stories from the golden age of rock' n' roll

Available in all good bookshops

BLOOMSBURY CARAVEL

"Deep down in the depths of forgotten dreams/So far away, so long ago it seems"

On the cover: Nick Drake © Julian Lloyd/ Bridgeman Images (newsstand); Tony Evans/Getty Images (collector's cover)

AT what point in an artist's career do rumour and conjecture solidify into myth – and at what point do those myths then become accepted as fact? In the case of our cover star, Nick Drake, it seems as if they began to swirl not long after his death, in 1974, and have continued to solidify and grow ever since. What Nick Hasted has done in this month's cover story is transcend the tragic myth to discover a very different Nick Drake: a confident, receptive young man, as happy to busk in the streets of southern France as serenade The Rolling Stones in Morocco as he embarks on what one of his companions calls "a great adventure". Our piece begins, meanwhile, in London, in the front room of an old school friend of Drake, who opens to us his notebooks from their travels, full of lists of records and books they shared. It feels like a significant piece of work as we head towards what would have been Drake's 75th birthday in June.

To accompany this, Tom has also compiled a stunning CD of music in the spirit of Nick Drake, featuring beautiful tracks from Joan Shelley, Juana Molina, Adrianne Lenker and many more. It is, we humbly believe, another indispensable *Uncut* CD for your collection.

Elsewhere in the issue you'll find lively new interviews with Stephen Stills, Julian Cope, David Johansen and Evan Dando among others, as well as a tribute to Mark Stewart and – as a positive affirmation of the healing power of music after great tragedy – an interview with Low's Alan Sparhawk about his new band, Damien. It's a feast, in other words. And I genuinely can't think of anywhere else where you'll read major pieces on Nick Drake *and* Flowered Up in the same issue.

Drop me a line about the mag any time – letters@uncut.co.uk.

Michael Bonner, Editor. Follow me on Twitter @michaelbonner

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A sense of purpose

MARK STEWART | 1960–2023

The Pop Group's Gareth Sager salutes the "relentless energy" of his inspirational bandmate

"MARK was pretty intense but always very amusing. He had a great sense of humour, a great sense of fun right from a young age. Because he was much taller than anybody else he could get into nightclubs and all that sort of stuff when nobody else could. But because of that he also used to get picked on. He had a few nasty little beatings that he was always pretty brave in facing up to. One particular one, these guys were hitting him with pool cues and he was just shouting at them: 'You're pathetic! Can't you do better than that?' So he was pretty resilient.

"He had a relentless energy and an incredible amount of information at his fingertips. He hoovered up anything from daytime TV to astrophysics and seemed to be able to talk about it at the drop of a hat and have a valid opinion on it. He was also an enormous fan of music. Whether it was David Bowie or Jah Shaka Soundsystem, he really loved it and he really loved to share it. He was so enthusiastic he would be able to get anybody interested in anything he was interested in.

"He could always make you laugh, even when things had gone really wrong. He may have fucked up massively but somehow he could always bring a smile to my face. However desperate the situation had got, somehow he'd be able to flip it on its head. There was a time when we were having all sorts of problems. When the police turned up, he was able to charm them completely and get them to go away and leave us alone.

"His conspiracy theory area was pretty good, without it being too pompous. He was able to put some things into lyrics and pull it off without it being too overtly party political – 'We Are All Prostitutes' was brilliant for that.

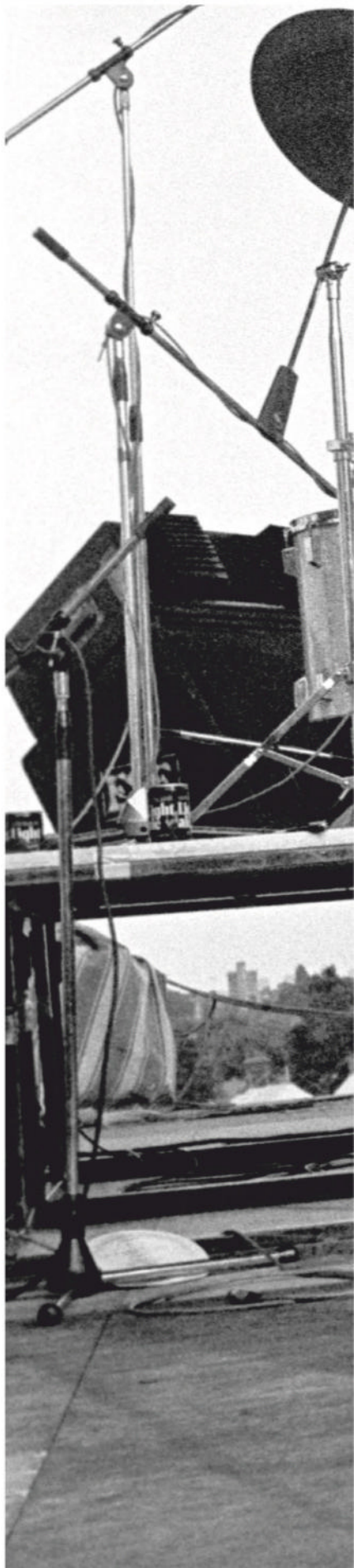
"The Pop Group introduced all these different colours into the period after punk where we thought that punk meant you'd be able to go out there and do anything you wanted and there should be no formula whatsoever. We totally ran with the idea that you should be able to mix up French chanson with dub and put a bit of free jazz in there; all these things can work together if they come from the right personalities. That ability to juxtapose different genres and types of music and sound is really important.

"One of his great talents was deconstructing the ordinary. I could put something together and then he would pull it apart and build it up from Z to A rather than from A to Z, as I put it down. I think he was trying to make people aware of the liveliness of life, the positive side of life."

> "One of his great talents was deconstructing the ordinary"
> GARETH SAGER

INTERVIEW BY MARK BEAUMONT

Sager and Stewart with The Pop Group, Bristol, Feb 14, 2016



DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS; ADAM GASSON/REDFERNS

Larger than life: Mark Stewart on stage at Alexandra Palace, London, June 15, 1980

Brian storm!

"An embodiment of all our dreams", "a cruel fucker", or just "a very hurt little boy"? Nick Broomfield explodes the myth of Brian Jones

Golden boy: Brian Jones, September 1965

IN 1963, Nick Broomfield spotted Brian Jones on a Cheltenham-bound train, and was invited into his first-class compartment to chat. "I was 14 and at boarding school," the director recalls, "and he represented an anti-authoritarian way of being. It turned out he was a trainspotter, and was on that line quite a lot. He was extremely friendly, and happy for me to come in and sit down. It's one of those events you remember."

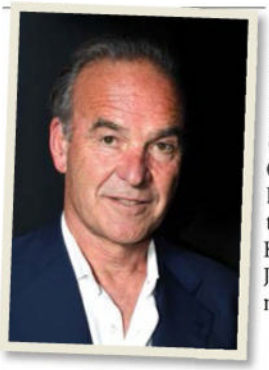
Broomfield's new BBC documentary, *The Stones And Brian Jones*, contrasts that first, sweet encounter with Bill Wyman's recollection of "a fucker... I don't want to say evil, but he was really cruel." "Stories don't always have to be about saints," Broomfield argues. "But Brian was talented, and I wanted to find out what had gone wrong."

Wyman is the sole Stone to contribute to the doc, eagerly pulling out stems from his archive's multi-tracks to isolate Jones' crucial slide guitar on "Little Red Rooster", and his recorder spiralling through "Ruby Tuesday". "Bill felt that Brian was badly let down in terms of the Stones' legacy," Broomfield says, "and that his contribution needs to be recognised." Jones' lack of songwriting was his Achilles' heel. But newly uncovered tapes find him tentatively seeking his own creativity, playing guitar with Hendrix, and writing a stumbling, baroque song with *Ready Steady Go!* presenter Michael Aldred. They suggest possibilities that Jones lacked the confidence and discipline to pursue.

A stash of letters discovered in 2019, meanwhile, show the painful generation gap between Jones and his parents, who threw him out aged 16. "There was a very hurt little boy there," Broomfield says. He also interviews Jones' surviving ex-girlfriends, five of whom were abandoned with a child, but offer surprisingly affectionate portraits. "All the women I spoke to said that when he was with you, he gave you everything, and they felt amazing with him. He represented a high point in their lives. They still seem to love him deeply."

The film's most touching revelations lie in the home movies of Brian as a boy. Amid footage of Stones gig riots, film of his teenage haunt Filby's Jazz Club is just as thrilling in its way. "That was a liberation movement in uptight Cheltenham, and must have been absolutely wonderful for Brian. People were playing Howlin' Wolf records, and the club was an adventure into the unknown, looking for a different kind of future, giving Brian and his friends an enormous lust for life."

> **"Brian was talented, and I wanted to find out what had gone wrong"**
> **NICK BROOMFIELD**



The film is in some ways a companion piece to Broomfield's *Marianne & Leonard: Words Of Love*, which showed the collateral human damage to Leonard Cohen's liberated lifestyle in Hydra in the early '60s. As Keith Richards says of Jones: "Not everyone makes it."

"It's hard to imagine the uncharted territory they were going through," Broomfield reflects. "Just look at the concerts' wonderful anarchy. I went to some, and there was the sense of freedom and a bright future ahead of you. It was that wondrous naïveté and optimism in which I met Brian on the train. Then just six years later it had changed."

Broomfield focuses on footage of the young, innocent-looking fans at the Stones' Hyde Park gig after Jones' death on July 3, 1969. He was there himself. "We were in real shock that it had all ended so quickly. It just wasn't supposed to be like that. Brian's death made you pause and think, 'What happened? How did somebody who was an embodiment of all our dreams come to this?' Some part of the experiment was over." **NICK HASTED**

The Stones And Brian Jones premieres on BBC2 and iPlayer in mid-May

WOLFGANG KUHN/UNITED ARCHIVES VIA GETTY IMAGES; DAVE J HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES

Wheels deal: Ann-Margret today and (inset) with Elvis in *Viva Las Vegas* (1964)

The wild one

All hail Ann-Margret! Why the Harley-riding, Elvis-dating *Tommy* star is still rocking at 82

"I ALWAYS wanted to do everything," says Ann-Margret of her long and varied career. "I had a lot of energy and I still do." She isn't kidding. At 82, the Swedish-American actress, singer, dancer and stage performer – who first shot to stardom in 1963's *Bye Bye Birdie*, followed by a leading role opposite Elvis Presley in *Viva Las Vegas* – has just released *Born To Be Wild*, a forceful set of covers that taps into her reputation as Hollywood's ageless dynamo. A lifelong biker, the sleeve features a vintage shot of her in silver racing gear, astride a Triumph Tiger. She still rides a Harley-Davidson around Los Angeles. "It's gorgeous – lavender and white with daisies around the letters," she enthuses. "And it's *fast*. I've always liked speed. And a little danger!"

Co-produced by LA Guns' Adam Hamilton, *Born To Be Wild* features contributions from Pete Townshend, Joe Perry, Steve Cropper, Linda Gail Lewis, Rick Wakeman, Robben Ford, Brian Auger, Slim Jim Phantom and garage rock stalwarts The Fuzztones. "These are all wonderful songs that I've wanted to do for some while," she says. "A couple of them I've done in my stage act. I started doing 'Somebody's In My Orchard' a long time ago. And I'm crazy for 'Teach Me Tonight'."

A duet with good friend and one-time co-star Pat Boone, "Teach Me Tonight" also brings Ann-Margret full circle. The song originally appeared on her 1961 debut *And Here She Is*, whose hit single, "I Just Don't Understand", was later covered by The Beatles. The Townshend connection, meanwhile, reaches back to her Oscar-nominated turn on 1975's *Tommy*, where she played the hero's glamorous, emotionally frangible mother, despite being only two years older than Roger Daltrey. "I called Pete Townshend the other day and we had a good time talking and laughing," she says. "Before we invited him to play guitar on the album, I hadn't seen him or spoken to him since 1975."

Ann-Margret's turn in *Tommy* is particularly memorable for the scene in which her character throws a champagne bottle at her TV set, out of which spurts a tsunami of soap suds, baked beans and chocolate. "Oh boy, nothing could've prepared me for that!" she chuckles. "When we did that scene for the first time, Ken [*Russell, director*] said: 'I don't want you to look up and have horror in your face because of what's coming down at you.' So I had to really try not to signal that. I was wearing that silver-knit catsuit and he was shouting: 'Come toward me! More! More!' I was just flailing around and couldn't see anything. Then all of a sudden I saw blood coming from my left hand, which I'd cut on the glass from the television screen. Now I have a scar that reminds me of it every day. But doing the movie was a wonderful experience."

> "Elvis and I felt music the same way"

Born To Be Wild also features a rendition of doo-wop standard "Earth Angel", featuring Harvey Mandel and The Oak Ridge Boys. Its inclusion begs mention of Elvis, who covered the song in the late '50s. These days, Ann-Margret doesn't care to discuss the romance that blossomed between the pair during the making of *Viva Las Vegas*, but she does recall their instant connection on set. "I really hadn't seen him perform before I did the film," she reveals. "I was so excited. When we started dancing to the music together, we looked at each other and we were moving exactly the same way. I got a kick out of that. He and I felt music the same way." ROB HUGHES

Born To Be Wild is out now on Cleopatra Records

Cut!: scarred while filming *Tommy* (1975)

A QUICK ONE

It's pretty good-looking, for a magazine! Celebrating the 20th anniversary of the epochal *Elephant*, the latest **Ultimate Music Guide** honours **The White Stripes** and the solo career of **Jack White**: guitarist, entrepreneur, visionary. Includes revealing archive interviews and in-depth reviews, plus new recollections about the making of *Elephant* and that initial surge of White Stripes mania. Out May 18...

Neurosurgeon screaming for more? Why not show them the new *Uncut* special, **Curated By King Crimson**. Robert Fripp and Crimsons past and recent curate our archive and share their thoughts on their own albums, their influences, their favourite records and their life in music. That's in shops now, and as with the White Stripes mag you can order it direct from us at Uncut.co.uk/single...

The Band's **Garth Hudson** made his first public performance in six years at April's Flower Hill House Concert No 6 – an event hosted by the musician Sarah Perrotta in upstate New York. A moving and joyous clip shared on social media (which you can also view at Uncut.co.uk) showed Hudson at the piano, playing Duke Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady"...

End Of The Road's non-music lineup will include comedians **Lou Sanders**, **Sophie Duker**, **Sara Pascoe**, **Robin Ince** and **Simon Munnery**, plus **Jeremy Deller** and **Miki Berenyi** discussing their recent books. And don't forget *Uncut*'s famous Q&A sessions, details of which will be announced nearer the time...

SUNSET BOULEVARD/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES; TCD/PROD.DB/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

"Art is long, life is short"

Ryuichi Sakamoto lives on forever in his groundbreaking final work

"RYUICHI was always looking for different ways of understanding music," explains Todd Eckert, director of *Kagami*, an ambitious 'mixed reality' collaboration with the late, great Ryuichi Sakamoto. "It's not about technology, even though that's fundamental to what we're doing. The whole point of this is the ongoing connection between an artist and their audience."

Due to premiere in June at the Manchester International Festival and The Shed in New York, *Kagami* promises a new kind of concert experience. Audience members will view the virtual Sakamoto performing on piano via optically treated glasses, each song in surround sound and accompanied by its own set of visuals. The footage of Sakamoto, who developed the idea over four years with Eckert's Tin Drum company, was captured by 48 different cameras, allowing people to wander around the stage and watch from different perspectives.

> "He would tell the most surprising, human, candid stories"
> *KAGAMI* DIRECTOR TODD ECKERT

"He was always wonderful to be around," says Eckert, whose friendship with Sakamoto dates back to the late '90s. "He would tell the most surprising, human, candid stories. He told me that when he was a child, his teacher asked him, 'What do you want to be when you're an adult?' He said, 'I want to be nothing.' It wasn't nihilism, but more like, 'I want to exist between the planes.' And you could see in his eyes, during *Kagami*, he was feeling that again. He looked at me and said, 'Weird kid, huh?'"

Eckert reveals that *Kagami*'s setlist will include a few surprises, among them the first ever 'live' outing for "The Seed And The Sower" from Sakamoto's ravishing soundtrack to 1983's *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, and a previously unheard tribute to Bernardo Bertolucci, for whom he scored 1987's epic *The Last Emperor*.

"Ryuichi and I were in Tokyo and he pulled out this piece of sheet music from his bag. He said, 'Bertolucci was like a spiritual father to me. When he died, I just walked into my studio and I played how I felt about him. The only people that have ever heard this song are his family at the funeral.' So that's what we conclude with."

In its own distinct way, *Kagami* guarantees Sakamoto's immortality. It was an idea not lost on the man himself. "This virtual me will not age, and will continue to play the piano for years, decades, centuries," he reflected, in notes on the show written before his death from cancer in March. In the words of Sakamoto's favourite saying, widely shared after his passing, "Art is long, life is short". ⓤ

ROB HUGHES

Posthumous modernists: the late Ryuichi Sakamoto in 2022 and (inset) Todd Eckert

LUIGI & IANGO; BRUCE GLIKAS/WIREIMAGE; FRANS SCHELLEKENS/REDFERNS

Magic touch: Sakamoto in 1987

RYUICHI SAKAMOTO (1952–2023)

RYUICHI Sakamoto started out as a session player while at university in Tokyo during the '70s. He made his experimental solo debut in 1978, coinciding with the advent of Yellow Magic Orchestra, the pioneering proto-techno trio he co-founded with Haruomi Hosono and Yukihiro Takahashi. The band's initial run of albums proved hugely influential for a new wave of synth-pop and hip-hop artists.

By the time YMO signed off with 1983's *Service*, Sakamoto had moved into soundtracks, immediately making a mark with *Merry Christmas, Mr Lawrence*, in which he also debuted as an actor, opposite David Bowie. Its hit main theme, "Forbidden Colours", was recorded with David Sylvian, who became a regular collaborator. While Sakamoto's solo work continued to explore abstract themes and global fusion, his successful film scores included *The Sheltering Sky* (1990), *Little Buddha* (1994) and 2015's *The Revenant*. Perhaps his most celebrated is 1987's *The Last Emperor*, which won him an Oscar, alongside David Byrne and Cong Su. Sakamoto's creative endeavours extended to opera, art installations and the formation of the Commons label, while he continued to make wondrous solo albums, his final effort being this year's graceful sound diary, *12*.

UNCUT PLAYLIST

On the stereo this month...

PJ HARVEY
"A Child's Question, August" PARTISAN RECORDS
"Rooks tell stories across the corn..." Peej goes birdwatching on quietly ravishing first single from *I Inside The Old Year Dying*.

ANOHNI
My Back Was A Bridge For You To Cross ROUGH TRADE
After the biting avant-pop of *Hopelessness*, a return to intimate, soulful textures in an "echo from the future" to Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On*.

THE CIRCLING SUN
Spirits SOUNDWAY
Kiwi out here: blissful new spiritual jazz from New Zealand, featuring languid Latin rhythms and a choir of Pacific Island and Maori singers.

JIM WALLIS
In Huge Gesturing Loops
TIP TOP RECORDINGS
Modern Nature/Still Corners drummer embraces Ambient Americana, foregrounding the spectral pedal steel of Henry Senior.

ALOGTE OHO & HIS SOUNDS OF JOY **O Yinne!** PHILOPHON
From Bongo in northern Ghana, an exhilarating swirl of highlife guitar, gospel chants, slinky polyrhythms and synth-funk flair. Labelmate Jimi Tenor pitches in on sax and flute.

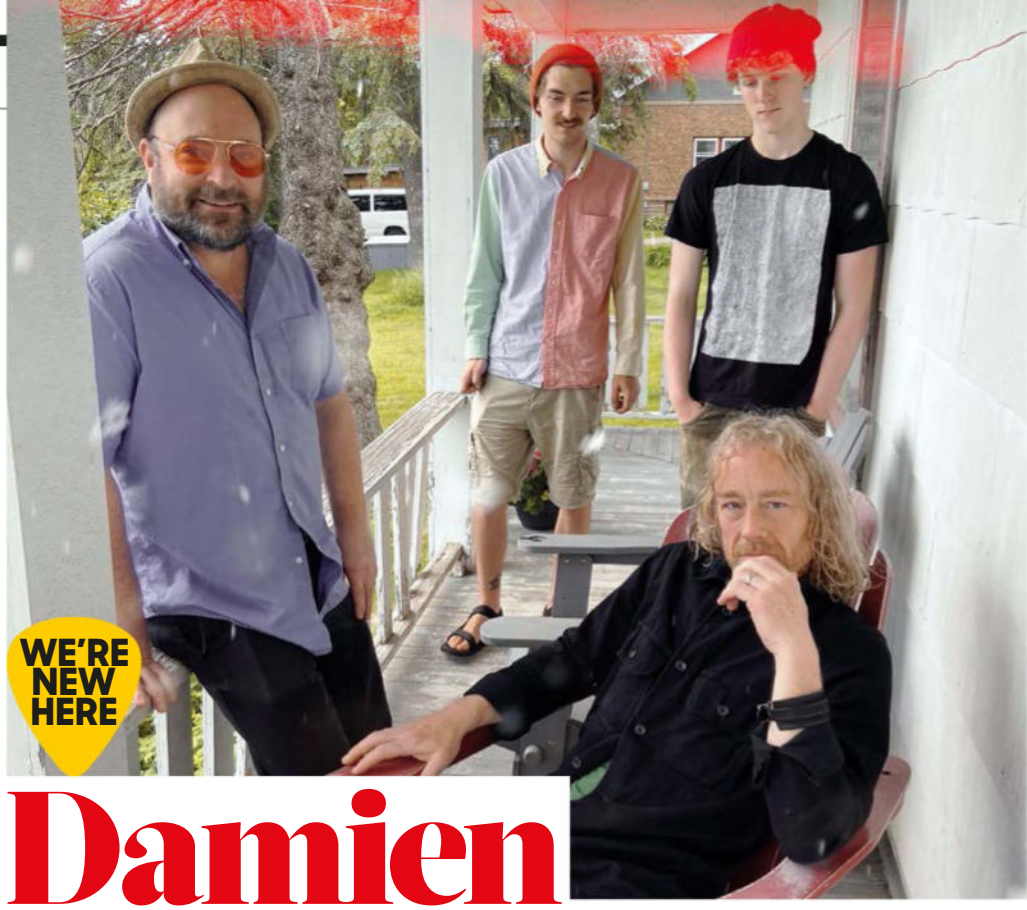
JULIE BYRNE
The Greater Wings GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL
Sublimating grief into a work of extended rapture, with Byrne's celestial voice accompanied by a serene, drum-less vista of acoustic guitar, harp, piano, synth and strings.

CHOCOLATE HILLS
Yarns From The Chocolate Triangle
ORBSCURE
Toblerone up! It's Metamono's Paul Conboy and The Orb's Alex Paterson at their most whimsical and bucolic.

NAOMI YANG
Never Be A Punching Bag For Nobody OST BANDCAMP
Wistful electronic score for Yang's own documentary about a Boston boxing gym holding out against gentrification – see our DVD review on page 107.

WOLFMANHATTAN PROJECT
Summer Forever And Ever
IN THE RED
Ten sulphurous blasts from the garage-punk supergroup comprising The Dirtbombs' Mick Collins, Pussy Galore's Bob Bert and The Gun Club's Kid Congo Powers.

TONY ALLEN JID018 JAZZ IS DEAD
The Jazz Is Dead series can occasionally get a bit formulaic. But half an hour of unheard Allen sorcery, recorded shortly before his death in 2020? Count us in.



Damien

Omen-inspired electronic funk quartet, featuring Low's Alan Sparhawk and his son, Cyrus

"I'M finding it difficult to approach music from where Low was," admits Alan Sparhawk, understandably, following the tragic loss of his wife and bandmate Mimi Parker to cancer last November. "Whether it's the songs, or trying to even just imagine 'What is this? Where am I?'" So rather than inhabiting Low's headspace, Sparhawk's current energies are focused on a very different project, fronted by his old friend and Ween covers band cohort Marc Gartman.

After a year's gestation in Duluth, Minnesota, jamming and recording in Sparhawk's home studio, Damien emerged in March with a self-titled debut single – a dream-pop love song in Flaming Lips style, inspired by the selfless devotion of the nanny who hangs herself in *The Omen* declaring, "Damien, it's all for you". The macabre undercurrent continues thoughout their first album *The Boy Who Drew Cats*, half an hour of psychedelic house, electronic funk, Afro-Cuban rhythms and Mario Kart electronics retelling a Japanese fable that Gartman's father would read him as a child: a boy is cast out of his town for his obsessive love of drawing cats, only to find himself lost in an abandoned church, hiding in a closet. "In the night he hears horrible screaming and ravaging of flesh," Gartman explains with relish. "He wakes up in the morning and finds that the cats that he drew have come to life and saved him from a giant goblin rat. It always kinda kept with me."

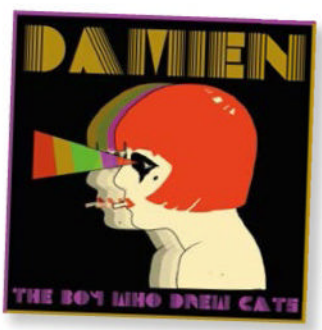
Damien also features Sparhawk's son Cyrus on bass, the pair having already honed their chemistry in funk band Derecho. "Having family to still be musical with was a pretty powerful line to have through the last couple of years," he says. "It's really great when you're trying to find the groove, you're trying to find this elusive thing, because it's all very unspoken. When you finally go, 'There it is'... to be able to look across the room and give him a little bit of a grin, it's a real joy. Mim saw us play a couple of times and she loved it. Her son playing music and having fun with his dad, it was really powerful."

> **"It sounds like a cliché, but music is saving me"**
> **ALAN SPARHAWK**

Sparhawk has found it personally beneficial to explore poppier and more danceable styles, while allowing Gartman to take the lead. "It's nice to still come to music without it being 'OK, what do you have to say now?' There's an ability to focus on other parts of the music and let it go through you without it having to go through certain gates in your mind."

He is writing songs again, but doesn't plan to revive the Low name. "Low was definitely Mim and I," he says, subdued. "I'm still not sure what I am without Mim. It's disorienting, and I'm really grateful that I have some ways of still playing music. It sounds kinda like a cliché, but definitely music is saving me. It's proving to be one of the few things in the universe that I can go to somehow and it's still just what it is. There's parts of it that are untouched, but there are also parts that will never be the same. I guess at some point I'll figure out my place in that, [*but*] I'm pleasantly surprised at how resilient music is."

MARK BEAUMONT



FREE CD

Made To Love Magic

15 tracks in the spirit of Nick Drake

1 JAMES ELKINGTON
Make It Up

We begin with an opener from songwriter and producer James Elkington's debut, 2017's *Wintres Woma*. Of course, it borrows the frantic picking, nimble double bass and speedy percussion from Nick Drake's "'Cello Song", but the rest is all Elkington and his own muse.

Joan Shelley

2 JOAN SHELLEY
Haven

With a low-strung guitar lazily strummed, a short runtime and a plaintive melody, this cut from Shelley's *Like The River Loves The Sea* (2019) seems to channel the stark isolation of *Pink Moon* through the lush fields of Kentucky.

3 DAVID BREWIS
High Time

Far away from his usual work with Field Music, David Brewis' recent album *The Soft Struggles* mixes sophisticated songwriting with jazz textures, languid piano, brushed drums, strings and saxophone, much as Drake did on something like *Five Leaves Left*'s masterful "Saturday Sun".

4 ADRIANNE LENKER
Womb

This solo cut from the Big Thief songwriter's 2018 LP *abysskiss* showcases her firm, metronomic picking style and her love for wild alternate tunings, both attributes she shares with Tanworth-in-Arden's favourite son.

5 THE DELGADOS
Reasons For Silence (Ed's Song)

While Motherwell's finest always had a noisier streak, they loved strings and skyward-fluttering flute from the beginning. Here's one of Emma Pollock's songs from 2000's career-peak *The Great Eastern*, written in an open tuning and aglow with bittersweet melodies.

6 JUNI HABEL
Drifting Pounds Of The Train

The bucolic, rural feel of much of Drake's work is captured here by Norwegian singer-songwriter Habel in a piece from her new album, *Carvings*. Woody, picked acoustic guitar keeps this six-minute song rolling along the tracks, while ambient strings blossom in the background.

7 CASS McCOMBS
Real Life

Though he's generally an electric guitarist, the bard of the Bay Area occasionally straps on an acoustic: in this hushed highlight from 2019's *Tip Of The Sphere*, he's mixing tabla, droning cello and embers of piano with a pensive gem of a melody.

8 JESSICA PRATT
Greycedes

Pratt's complex structures and Tropicália-infused chords echo the languorous, sun-dappled harmonies so beloved of Drake on his first two albums. Even so, strange premonitions hover around the fringes of this miniature treasure from the songwriter's second album, *On Your Own Love Again*. *"Oh, stargazer,"* she calls, *"gaze for a while..."*

Jessica Pratt

José González

9 ELIJAH McLAUGHLIN ENSEMBLE
Interlude

An intermission in the Ensemble's 2022 record, *II*, this contemplative instrumental combines McLaughlin's vibrant picking with buzzing cello, jangling mandolin and an ever-rising air of eeriness.

10 JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ
The Void

While some of 2021's *Local Valley* found González experimenting with electronic beats, this track retains his usual hypnotic fingerpicking, rippling across his nylon-stringed guitar as his low, whispered voice unhurriedly weaves a potent spell.

11 JUANA MOLINA
Un Beso Llega

On this track from her 2006 LP, *Son*, the pioneering Argentinian songwriter gradually layers galloping acoustic arpeggios with loops of serene, velveteen vocals and peeling electronic tones. The textures are more experimental, but there's an air of Drake's measured single-mindedness in this epic.

12 JIM GHEDI & TOBY HAY
A Year And A Day

The latest, self-titled album from these British acoustic guitarists often recalls Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, sometimes Davy Graham or Martin Carthy, yet on this piece their light-fingered propulsion and major-key meditations are most recognisably Drake-esque.

13 DANIEL ROSSEN
Unpeopled Space

You Belong There, Rossen's 2022 solo debut, showcased his singular style: there was his fluid acoustic guitar, of course, and his skills across a range of instruments, but also an ornate gloom at its heart reminiscent of Drake's crafted, detached takes on the darker side of life.

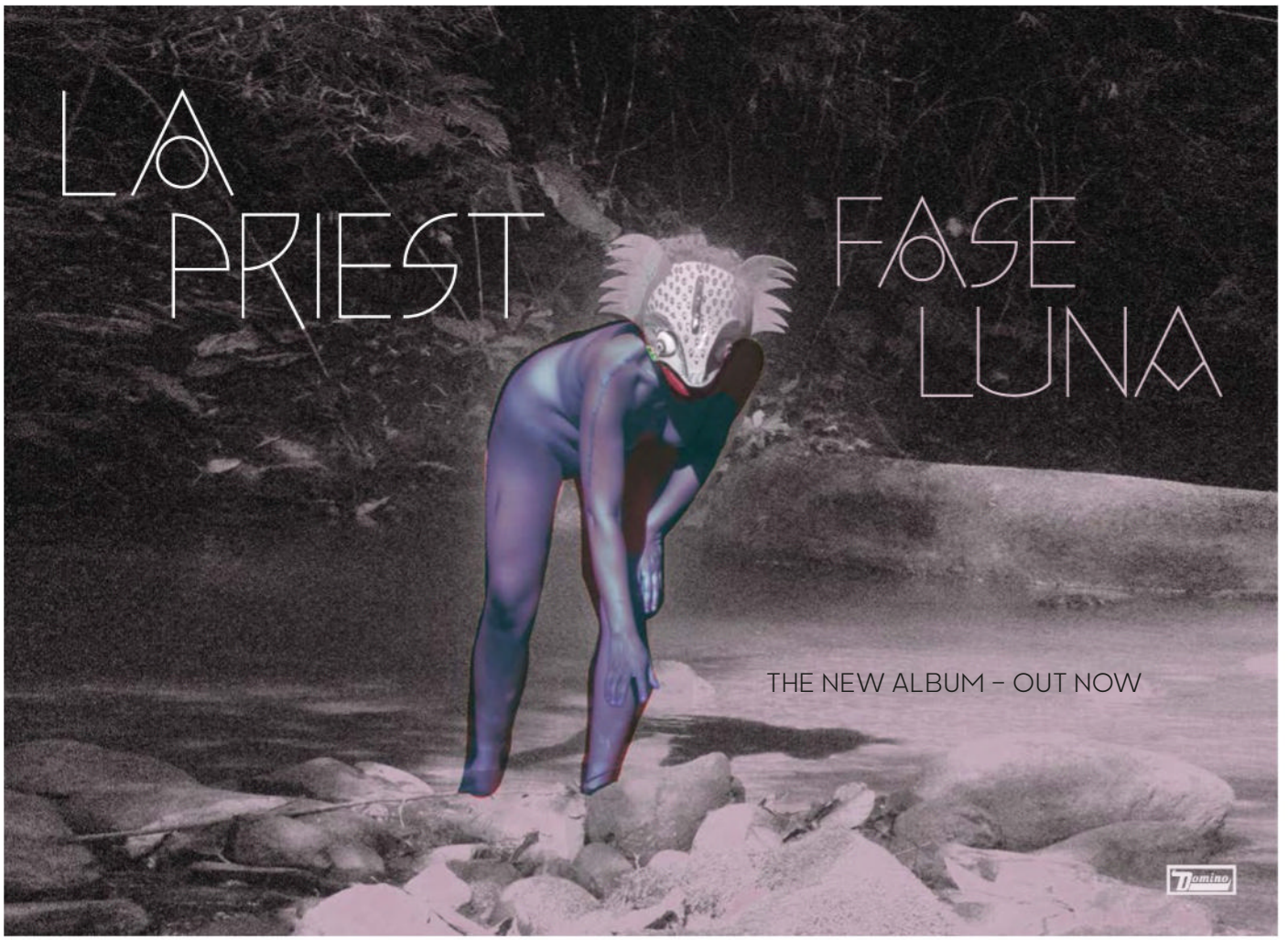
14 SAM AMIDON
Spanish Merchant's Daughter

A light-footed folk piece from Amidon's self-titled album, it finds the American songwriter mixing traditional lyrics with lush, jazzy instrumentation, most notably the saxophone that winds its way through his words.

15 ROBYN HITCHCOCK
I Saw Nick Drake

We close with this psychedelic troubadour's surreal and mournful take on the late songwriter. They could have crossed paths at Cambridge if Hitchcock had been a few years older, but instead he had to meet him in a dream: *"I saw Nick Drake/And he was fine..."*

MICKIE WINTERS; VSA AMUEL RICHARD; PETER TOGGETH & MIKEL CEEKARLSSON


LA PRIEST
FASE LUNA
THE NEW ALBUM – OUT NOW
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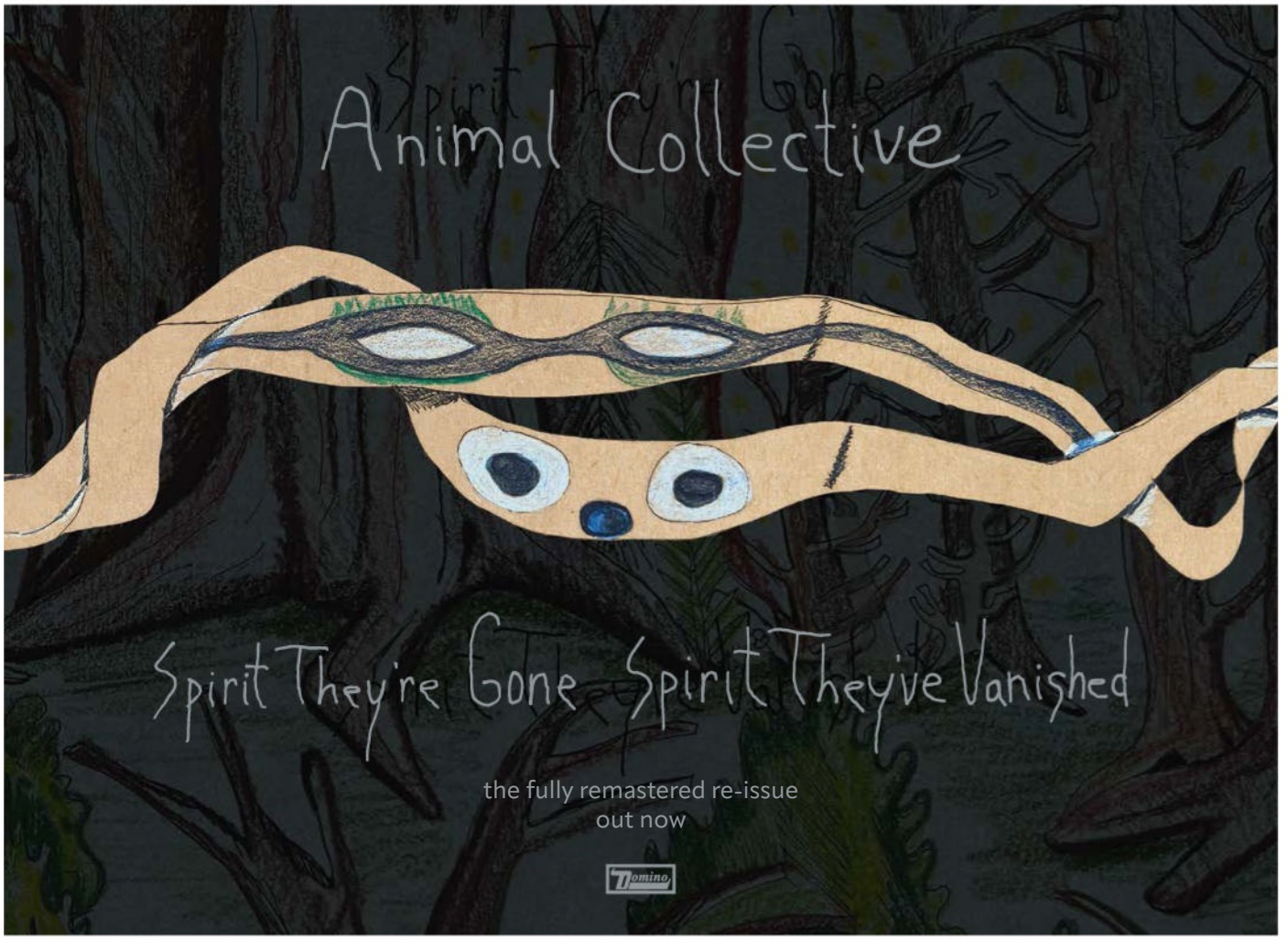

Animal Collective
Spirit They're Gone Spirit They've Vanished
the fully remastered re-issue
out now
Domino

Evan Dando: "I've always had really cool people around me"

"I was like, 'I'm gonna take as many drugs as possible... and not die!' I managed it, so far"

AN AUDIENCE WITH...

Evan Dando

The wayward Lemonheads mainman talks severed tendons, Nirvana jam sessions, "killer" new songs and his ultimate life goal: "an acoustic tour of Spain on horseback"

Interview by SAM RICHARDS

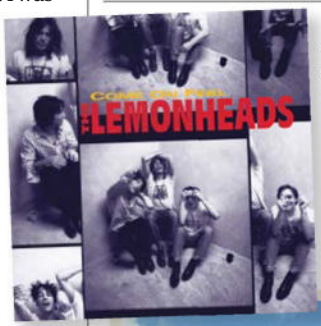
IS Evan Dando a troublemaker, or does the trouble find him? "I've been in so many cataclysms," he begins, pleading innocence. "The LA riots. 9/11, I was two blocks away..." But it may be harder to blame fate for his latest predicament. "I sat on a glass table and I reached down to pick up a fucking pencil and all of a sudden blood's flying all over the room," he jabbers, explaining why there's a bright blue cast on his left arm. "I hit an artery and I severed two tendons. They operated that night – and I still made the gig the next day in Argentina. They gave me a shot of morphine... I was like, 'You'd better give me a lot, because I need more than everybody else!'"

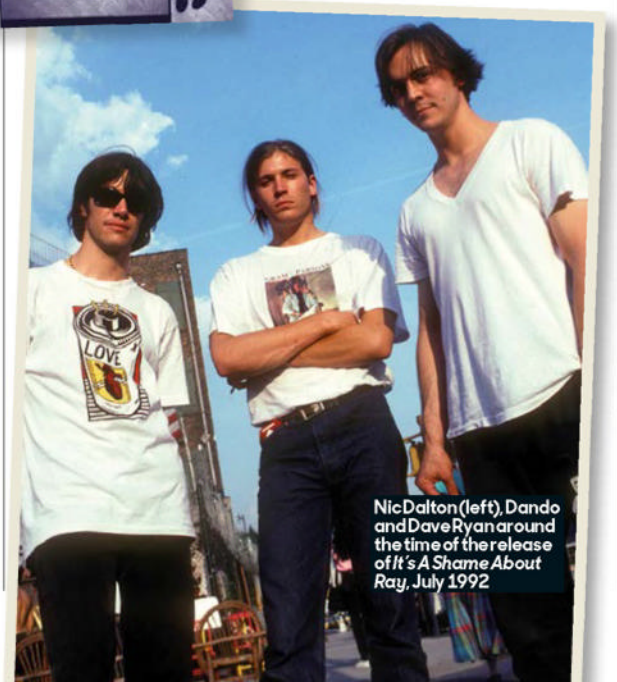
For reasons that never become entirely clear, Dando conducts our Zoom interview while ambling shoeless around a nondescript hotel lobby in Newark, New Jersey. But his heart lies 5,000 miles further south, in the mountains above São Paulo, where he will soon be marrying into songwriting royalty. "Renato Teixeira, my girlfriend-slash-fiancée's father, he's a national hero in Brazil, like Bruce Springsteen or something. He wrote a song called 'Romaria', which if you sing it in, like, a mall, everyone sings along. Brazilian music is so free, I love it. It goes all over the place."

A bit like Dando's train of thought, then. Strap in for 200-mile-an-hour tales of homoerotic art, being kidnapped by Dave Grohl and – hold the front page – actual new Lemonheads music. And yes, he has submitted a question for himself...

Why does someone with your songwriting skills do so many covers?
Martin Langston, via email

I'm not hung up on being the guy that wrote the song, I don't have a big ego about that. And I have some serious writing issues occasionally... I like the Stones and the Beatles records before they got wise, that are half covers and half originals. Those are the ideal albums. The Beatles doing Buddy Holly? Bring it, man! I think that's what I'm gonna do with my next record, fuck it.





Nic Dalton (left), Dando and Dave Ryan around the time of the release of *It's A Shame About Ray*, July 1992

STAR QUESTION

Could you tell me about the writing of "Big Gay Heart"?
Alexis Taylor, Hot Chip

I can tell you the whole story. I understand how people get freaked out because it's one of these half-jokes that turns into a crusade to end discrimination against gay people. But it all started because we were living in a house which was rented from a rich steward. We put all the homoerotic art in the closets and stuff – it was really graphic – and we're like, "OK, this is called the 'Big Gay House'." I called Tom Morgan, who I was writing with all the time back then, and it ended up being written in Perth, on a doily. We were having fun with the idea, but then it ended up being kinda serious. [*We figured*] it'll confuse the fuck out of people and it'll cut back on the teenage girls, which is good – I needed to cut back anyway. So that's what we were doing with that, dude: being a bit in-your-face weird and trying to free the word 'gay' from homosexuality, and also saying gimme a big thumbs down to violence against gay people.

Would you consider reuniting with the classic *Come On Feel*... lineup (Nic Dalton, David Ryan) for a tour?
Matt Davey, via email

I would. I think it's a good idea to do a tour of Australia and England, at least. They're in good nick, both of them. And fuckin' Dave's become a really well-regarded author... I'm, like, the *stoopidest* guy in The Lemonheads, with the least accomplishments. It's really true, because you see Corey Brennan on CNN sometimes talking about Romans. I've always had really cool people around me, that's one of my biggest strengths. For some reason, I have a knack of getting people. But when I'm on heroin, it's the other way – I get all the worst people. ➤

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS;MATILDA HILL-JENKINS

"I am The Lemonheads!": Dando in a field of one, 2006

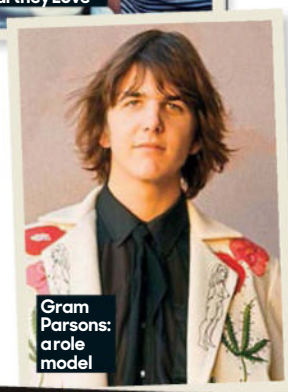
You once mentioned you visited a Nirvana rehearsal and joined the band on drums. What do you remember about that session?
Paul Jones, Liverpool
I was hijacked by Dave and Krist at the end of my show with Sarah McLachlan at Seattle Museum. We got in Dave's black Mustang and he drove crazy, like the young rock star that he was. We waited for Kurt to come down and he was like, "Wait a minute, why's Evan Dando in the back of the car?" But we ended up having a wonderful time and Kurt was a lovely dude. The four of us jammed for about an hour on this new song by Dave, it was really rad. I was like the first drummer in the Foo Fighters! And Kurt told me, "You're a really good drummer." I love Kurt Cobain, he was an amazing person. Everyone thought me and Courtney were having an affair when he was alive – that never fucking happened, it was just a good story.

STAR QUESTION

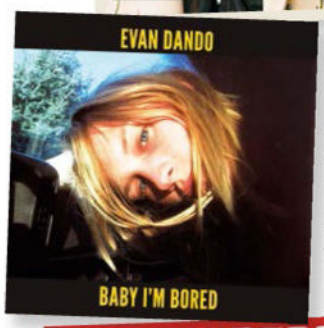
I remember being very excited when I first discovered Lemonhead candy in the US. In fact, it was the bittersweet nature of both candy and band that inspired my own song "Lemonhead Boy". Do you still like the candy?
Amelia Fletcher, Heavenly
Definitely. It's 'cause it's sweet on the outside and sour on the inside, and that describes the music. We told Iggy [*Pop*] and he was like, "Yeah, Lemonheads, sounds good", so we kept the name. He was doing a thing at the Paradise [*in Boston*] and I somehow got to hang out with him all night. He's the best. And then over the years, we ran into each other. He even called me up and was like, "Come over, we'll try to write a song." We jammed for a coupla hours and couldn't come up with anything, but boy, that was right up there with playing with Jonathan Richman and all the other shit I've done.

Evan, please share your thoughts and impressions of Gram Parsons and his music.
Bruce Snively, Lakeland, Florida
Oh man, it happened to me backwards. First of all I wrote "Ride With Me" and played it to my friend, and he was like, "Whoa, what the fuck? Have you been listening to a load of Ingram Cecil Connor?" I knew he hung out with the Stones and was kinda cool-looking. But I was already like that: my family's from South Carolina, I'm related to this guy DuBose Heyward, I have country in my blood. And then when I heard [*Parsons*] I was like, 'This is what I'm gonna focus on for a while, this is how I'm gonna try to be. I'm gonna take as many drugs as possible and sing really relaxed... and not die!' I managed it, so far. I'm feeling great lately.

The "amazing" Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love


Gram Parsons: a role model

Is it true that Ben Deily left the band after you played the "Sweet Child O' Mine" riff over and over?
Duncan Jack, via email
Well, yeah – in time. But that night, none of us were that into it. He was going off to pursue Keats and was like, "I'm not coming on tour because I've got to hang out with my girlfriend and do my homework because I [*want to*] go to Harvard." OK, it seems like the end of this, you know? At first it was acrimonious, we even put him in the reissue of *Lovey* giving us the finger. But it's all good now. I love Ben, he's a super-intelligent person – he made a bunch of important commercials. Obviously I'm the least connected, most fucked-up member of the band. Everyone else has their shit together – they do scriptwriting, one's a monk... But I'm getting there.



"Everyone thought me and Courtney were having an affair when Kurt was alive – that never fucking happened"

STAR QUESTION

When I guested with you in London last year, I fulfilled a long-held dream by finally getting to play at the Roundhouse. Are there any long-held musical dreams that you still want to fulfil?
Nick Saloman, The Bevis Frond
I wanna crawl into my own nose. No, OK, I wanna play the Hammerstein Ballroom – does it still exist? I want to travel time for the future of mankind. My goal in life is to die at the Ozzy concert. I'd love to do an acoustic tour of Spain on horseback. And Nick, if you wanna come along, please come. Nick is one of the most wonderful people I've ever met. I can't believe he came and played with us, I didn't think we were cool enough.

Considering how beloved your only solo album is, isn't it time for another?
Pete Thornes, via email
That's a question on nobody's lips, man. It's all the same shit – I thought I made that clear by putting out a tape I made by myself in the middle of the night on a Walkman and calling it *The Lemonheads*. I am The Lemonheads! For better or fuckin' worse. And these days, I've gotten over my irony and, like, drug problems... But I've decided to call this next one The Lemonheads because I have a new band that's actually a proper band: Lee Falco and Farley Glavin. They're the best band I've ever had and I want them to contribute musically. So it's gonna be a band record, it's all loud. We got three songs done, three demos that are really killer. It's actually fuckin' happening. We're gonna record it in Brazil in June, it's gonna be done by July, August, so it'll come out at Christmas or whatever. Latest, early next year. My friend Apollo [*Carvalho*]'s producing and it's gonna be called *Togetherness Is All I'm After*, that's the working title.

What's she really like?
Evan Dando, via Twitter
I can be frustratingly depressed for a long time. I am over-the-top, but I'm sometimes very, very, very under-the-top. I'm changeable, moody, probably bipolar. But deep down I'm a very kind person, and I think that anyone that knows me knows that. I have an imagination – too much of an imagination. I used to sleepwalk a lot. I am volatile. I am cautious. I am a good driver. I am violent sometimes, at things. I am erratic and very, very predictable. I'm a surfer and a skateboarder and I love to ski. And I love to play guitar. I love playing music, you know?

Come On Feel The Lemonheads (30th Anniversary Edition) is released by Fire on May 19

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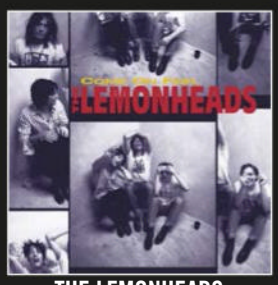

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NOSTALGIA KILLER
WESTERN VINYL LP / CD
Sticky with unresolved, living feelings, on Nostalgia Killer Lightning Dust's Amber Webber sings of romantic warfare channeling Stevie Nicks, while echoing the spirits of Grace Slick and Beth Gibbons.

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The Detroit trio's fifth album is a cinematic blend of twangy industrial rock, metal, noise, baritone vocals, and macabre lyrics. It's their most urgent, focused album to date.

ROXY GORDON
CRAZY HORSE NEVER DIED
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The first reissue of the 1988 album by Choctaw, Assiniboine, and Texan poet, activist, and musician Roxy Gordon (First Coyote Boy) (1945–2000), acclaimed by Townes Van Zandt and Leonard Cohen.

BEACH FOSSILS
BUNNY
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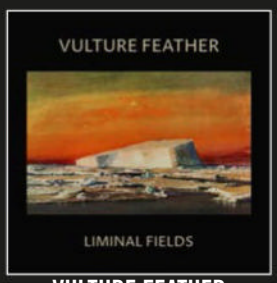
Earning their stature as one of the most definitive and enduring bands of the last decade, 'Bunny' is Beach Fossils' most vivid, grounded and personal work to date.



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LIMINAL FIELDS
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MANGANESE
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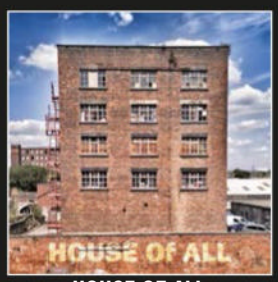

HOUSE OF ALL
HOUSE OF ALL
TINY GLOBAL PRODUCTIONS LP / CD
Ex-Fall members. "HOUSE Of ALL has a unique energy, each member playing sharply around motorik grooves against Bramah's mystical lyrics without a hint of compromise."

LAUREN HELENE GREEN
OUTER HIGHWAY REALMS
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WHISKERMAN
CHAMPIONS (DELUXE EDITION)
ROYAL OAKIE CD
Originally released in 2016, Champions has become a fan favourite, widely regarded as Whiskerman's finest work. The new Deluxe Edition features 3 unreleased bonus tracks from the original album sessions.

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ORVILLE'S DISCOTEQUE
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THE UNCUT GUIDE TO THIS MONTH'S KEY RELEASES

CALIFONE

Villagers

JEALOUS BUTCHER

A quarter of a century on, fluid Chicago ensemble deliver a career high. *By Rob Hughes*

ALBUM OF THE MONTH 9/10

TWELVE years ago, indie filmmakers Solan Jensen and Joshua Marie Wilkinson attempted to make sense of Califone's world with a tour documentary. *Made A Machine By Describing The Landscape* was compiled from studio sessions, interviews and live performances, following the band as they played modest venues across Europe and in the States, culminating in a bleary pre-dawn homecoming in Chicago.

It's a pretty illuminating piece of vérité. Drummer Joe scours a rubbish dump for anything that might make a decent noise; the band pass time in the van by painting childlike art to sell at gigs; live shows feature the repeated spanking of a piano, experimental black-and-white films, and songs that seem to mutate of their own accord. If you didn't know better, you'd swear they were making it all up as they go along.

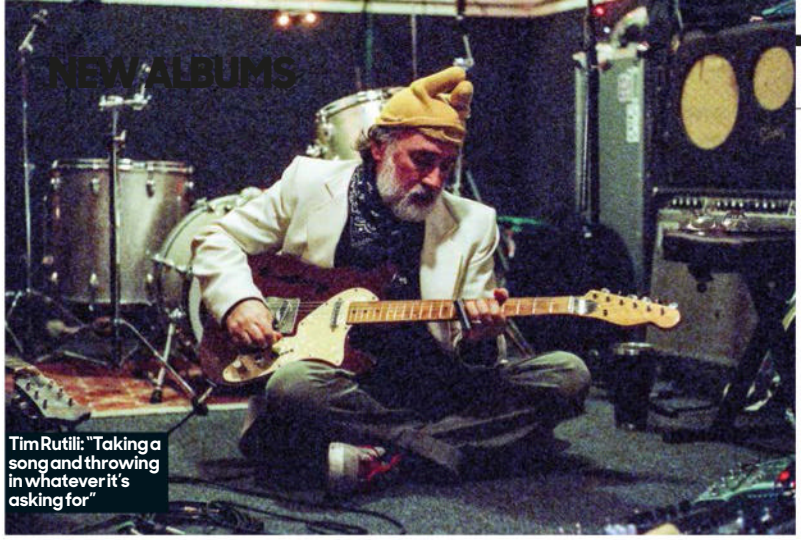
At one point, leader Tim Rutili offers some kind of rationale: "The friction between opposing elements – taking a song and throwing in whatever it's asking for, even if it doesn't make sense, even if it might be wrecking your original idea, or even if it might be marring the beauty of the melody – is at the bottom of all the music that we do." He goes on to suggest that if you're partial to Public Enemy, Captain Beefheart, Bob Dylan, Doc Boggs, Sonic Youth, Low and Neil Young, "you might like us. Maybe."

Califone may be self-effacing and unconventional, but they've turned the business of incongruous sound collage into a winning art. Rutili and his movable collective have been at this for 25 years now, a good while longer if you count predecessors Red Red Meat, whose approach was similarly investigative, if altogether louder and more rockist. What began as a solo home project quickly grew into something more expansive. Califone reached an early peak with 2003's *Quicksand/Cradlesnakes* and follow-up *Heron King Blues*, albums rooted in melodic acoustic folk and blues, then splintered by feedback, noise loops and electronica.

In keeping with Califone's non-linear slant, Rutili's lyrics lean heavily towards the abstract. *Heron King Blues* was a concept piece about a mythic man-bird, with references to ancient texts, angels and mad dogs. 2009's deliciously strange *All My Friends Are Funeral Singers* – layered with Optigan, fiddle, ring modulators and much more besides – came with an accompanying film, written and directed by Rutili, about ➤

TRAVIS HAIGH

Headgear music: Califone leader Tim Rutili



Tim Rutili: "Taking a song and throwing in whatever it's asking for"

a psychic's conflicted relationship with the ghosts that surround her.

Califone's creative endeavours have followed in much the same way since, though the release of just two albums since *All My Friends Are Funeral Singers* suggests the bond between band and captain might be somewhat ambiguous these days. Recent collaborations with the likes of Craig Ross and Boxhead Ensemble appear to have swallowed more of Rutili's time. "I'm the writer and cruise director of a morphing collective of people that can always return to this thing or not," he tells *Uncut*. "At this point Califone feels like its own universe. Coming back to this music after some time away always feels like returning home."

This may explain why *Villagers* is preoccupied with visions of belonging. The album's lyrics are no less oblique than we've come to expect over the years, but within the dense, fractured imagery lies the idea of searching for home, be it a real or imaginary one. Rutili's thematic quest finds its physical manifestation in his choice of core personnel. Percussionists Ben Massarella and Brian Deck (who also handles synths) were both former allies in Red Red Meat. Multi-instrumentalist Michael Krassner has functioned in Rutili's orbit for nearly as long, while drummer Rachel Blumberg has been a trusted part of Califone's live set-up for over a decade. All of these players are instinctively attuned to Rutili's guiding aesthetic, pairs of safe hands giving shape, form and expression to these wonderfully eclectic songs.

The results are reassuringly off-kilter and fabulously inventive. Very little adheres to accepted design. "The Habsburg Jaw" rattles away on a junkbed of guitar, bass and drums, before being sideswiped by a barrage of parps and squawks from shrill clarinet, sax and discordant electronica. The sublime "McMansions" starts with a gentle acoustic motif and the sleepy understatement of Rutili's voice, only to experience convulsions of guitar, atonal strings and what sounds like a creaking wardrobe inching across old floorboards.

Having entered as a slow procession, only to rise up around urgent piano, "Skunkish" feels like it's actively trying to deconstruct itself midway through. A sample of Arthur Conan Doyle, recorded during his spiritualism phase, complements the theme of a rigged séance in which everything is askew. But the song refuses to fall apart, held together by a vaguely swampy funk groove, with soft backing vocals from Macie Stewart and Nora O'Connor.

This element is central to why Califone succeed so brilliantly. At their core, Rutili's songs carry a melodic warmth and innate sense of rhythm that makes them endlessly inviting. And while he continues to nourish his passion for avant-noise and found sounds, he's essentially a pop songwriter who knows his way around a great hook.

"Comedy" is a languid piece with trumpet that feels like classic soul, abetted by Stewart and O'Connor on harmonies. It invites comparison with Wilco's sound experiments on *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, eventually dissolving into sour plinks of piano. "Ox-Eye" is similar, like Dionne Warwick's "Walk On By" beset by spasms and disappearing into punky fuzz and bleating horns. Beefheart meets Bacharach. Further intimations of Bacharach are there, too, in the bare, unguarded moments of "Sweetly".

Rutili's ideas of home, especially as a place of sanctuary, are perhaps best expressed in "Halloween". It's partly autobiographical, though told from the perspective of a couple of ageing goths. He and his actress wife Angela Bettis have recently been searching for somewhere to buy and stake as their own, prompting the lines: "*Wander around the story/When we get where we get you know the Halloween decorations are never coming down*".

Elsewhere, there are evocations of childhood ("McMansions"), shifting notions of time ("Sweetly") and an uneasy, self-delusional kind of nostalgia. The protagonist of "Comedy" returns home from war, but everything has changed, most of all himself, his memory unreliable. And the title track's disquiet is mirrored by the image of "*a Roxy Music cassette dying in the dashboard sun*".

Rutili's habitual forays into the surreal are very much present as well. "The Habsburg Jaw" follows a fanciful encounter with King Charles II of Spain, owner of the most elongated facial deformity of the House of Habsburg, the appalling upshot of centuries of royal inbreeding. "*Drink to the family money/The chemtrails and the holy grails*", sings Rutili, caught between horror and absurdity, "*The light on your Habsburg jaw/Proof that you belong*".

Similarly, it's the seemingly contrary forces in Califone's music that make it so memorable. Like late-period Talk Talk, Jim O'Rourke's Drag City records or the aforementioned Low, Rutili and his band thrive in the liminal space between accessible rock and rigorous exploration. *Villagers*' sleeve is telling: a pile of disparate old junk that somehow sits together as a piece. The remarkable thing is that this album achieves that so spectacularly.

SLEEVE NOTES

1 The Habsburg Jaw
2 Eyelash
3 McMansions
4 Villagers
5 Comedy
6 Ox-Eye
7 Halloween
8 Skunkish
9 Sweetly

Produced by: Brian Deck, Michael Krassner and Tim Rutili
Recorded at: Narwhal Studio, Chicago; Big Ego, Los Angeles; 7 Track Shack, Phoenix; Verdugo Sound & The Ship, Los Angeles; Speaking Mountain, New York; Quick Bear Sound, Glendale; Old Unconscious, Portland
Personnel includes: Tim Rutili (vocals, guitars, piano, synth, bass), Ben Massarella (drums, percussion), Rachel Blumberg (drums, percussion), Brian Deck (drums, percussion, electronics, synth), Michael Krassner (guitars, synth, piano, organ), Brad Dujmovic (bass, electronics, synth), Will Curry (saxophone, clarinet), Joshua Hill (violin, cello), Cory Gray (trumpet), Nora O'Connor (backing vocals), Macie Stewart (backing vocals)

HOW TO BUY...

{DISSONANCE AND DESERT NOIR}

Highlights from 25 years of Califone dreaming

Heron King Blues

THRILL JOCKEY, 2004

Based on Rutili's recurring dream about an ancient man-bird creature, Califone took Beefheart's improvised *Mirror Man* as a rough template, conjuring a deep and mysterious soundscape from dissonant rumbles, loops, horns and antsy guitars. Highlight: the epic "Sawtooth Sung A Cheater's Song". 2003's *Quicksand/Cradlesnakes* comes highly recommended too. **9/10**

All My Friends Are Funeral Singers

DEAD OCEANS, 2009

The follow-up to 2006's superb *Roots & Crowns* is a little less immediate, proposing a more nuanced approach that reveals more with every listen, folding Optigan, Stylophone, ukulele, mandolin and French horn into the textural mix. "Buñuel" is a suitably surreal nod to the Spanish filmmaker; "Ape-Like" goes hillbilly; "Krill" is just exquisite. **8/10**

Stitches

DEAD OCEANS, 2013

Califone's seventh album, and the first to be recorded outside Chicago, often reflects the wide-open vistas of their Californian base, from the desert noir slide of "Movie Music Kills A Kiss" to the purring ambience of "Turtle Eggs/An Optimist". Judicious use of drones and spacey electronica complete the filmic effect. **8/10**

TRAVIS HAIGH

Q&A

Califone's Tim Rutili on songs as people, fake psychics and a Spanish king's "mushy face"

Tim Rutili: "We all have stories that we carry around"

What was the overriding vision for this album?

I'd finished a film scoring job. The process of working quickly and making a whole bunch of almost old-fashioned movie music triggered some ideas that felt very personal. I'd gone a long time without writing songs, but this first batch of riffs, melodies and words felt worth working on. At first, the only intention was to dig in, write some songs and make demos. The deeper I got into it, little lyrical threads bubbled up and the songs became specific people. Some fictionalised, abstract versions of people that I know, and some other people that are built out of memories. As the whole thing took shape, the songs felt like the population of some hazy place.

What is it about playing around with elements that you wouldn't necessarily see as compatible?

The whole mission statement has always been to combine elements together that shouldn't be in the same universe. There was still some old beautiful-sounding instruments playing against brittle, digital sounds or cheap, broken Casio. This time there was more live playing and less looping and overdubbing. A lot of the friction came in the writing, arranging and feel of songs.

Were you listening to anything in particular during the writing process?

For one song we talked about it having a Dionne Warwick-meets-This Heat vibe. Another one we talked about J Dilla/D'Angelo making a Robert Altman movie. So lots of Burt Bacharach/Dionne Warwick. Curtis Mayfield, The Fall. I kept returning to this record by Chico Buarque and Ennio Morricone, called *Por Un Puñado De Samba* [1970]. Always some Neil Young and Beefheart and VU too. I think watching that extra-long Beatles doc, *Get Back*, crept into everything as well.

Tell me about "Skunkish", which includes an Arthur Conan Doyle sample.

I was picturing fragments of a movie about a fake psychic and their crew/family. It's probably a decade or so after the Civil War. They go town to town, doing séances and fleecing sad folks overwhelmed by death and loss. The movie probably takes place in wintertime. There's snow outside and no-one has seen bare sunlight for some time. There are velvet curtains and candles. Parlour rooms smell vaguely like burning hair. Everyone is a little bit drunk most of the time. There's something about a fake psychic being confronted by real supernatural stuff that gets me. Hopefully that's happening in this song because it's always happening in my head. We all have stories that we carry around and repeat like a personal mythology. I'm the hero. I'm the victim. I'm the trickster. I'm the lover. Like archetypal personal mythology tied into identity that is distorted and exaggerated over time to fit whatever narrative you think you need to survive. Fake psychic and chosen family are sick of each other and tired of all the stories they've heard and told a million times. The resentments are causing problems. Séances are going wrong. It's about to get worse.

> "Maybe I implode and wreck it when I need the band and my life to change" TIM RUTILI

How did "The Habsburg Jaw" come about?

I was listening to a European history podcast and wanted to learn more. There was something absurd, beyond horrible and funny to me about the inbred children of these people getting worse and worse the more they tried to hold on to power. It was like science fiction. As I started writing, this idea of entitlement came out. I had some imaginary conversations with a version of Charles [*II of Spain*]. It was during lockdown. He had that enormous mushy face. He was in a shitty apartment playing video games. Feeling stuck and watching murder docs on Netflix. He'd complain. I'd say: "Everyone is going through a similar thing right now." And he'd say, "*We* are not everyone!"

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the first Califone record. How has your attitude and approach changed since then?

Califone started as a solo project and then turned into a very busy touring and recording band for about a decade. Then things imploded and died. Then it kind of bloomed again, then it died again. Now it's blossoming again. Maybe I implode and wreck it when I need the band and my life to change. I feel like I've fucked up many things with the band and in other aspects of life and somehow survived and somehow still have some great old friends and collaborators that are willing to hang with me. I try not to repeat mistakes, but I'm much less afraid in general. That makes everything more fun, even when things take a weird turn. In the beginning, the process of making this music definitely started out mostly dark with some light spots. Now it feels mostly light with some dark spots. My whole life is in this body of work. I'm lucky, it's still growing, changing, deepening and refining, sometimes fucking things up. And there's always some new thing to discover.

INTERVIEW: ROB HUGHES

TRAVIS HAIGH

SUAREZ/PRESS

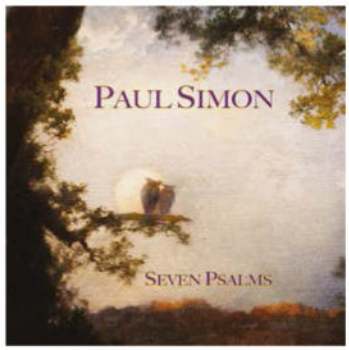
PAUL SIMON

Seven Psalms

OWL RECORDS/LEGACY

8/10

Echoes of a stellar back catalogue in the octogenarian New Yorker's captivating new song cycle. *By John Lewis*



PAUL SIMON is an artist filled with glorious paradoxes. He's the secular Jew who has made some of the greatest pieces of Christian pop music; the non-believer whose lyrics are obsessed with faith; the all-American boy who has immersed himself in the music of Jamaica, South Africa, Brazil and Olde England; the folk singer who makes soul music with the world's top jazz musicians; the choir-boy tenor who was rapping, conversationally, long before hip-hop. He's perhaps the most complex and interesting figure on that shortlist of America's greatest living songwriters – alongside Bob,

Stevie, Carole, Brian, Bruce, Smokey, Dolly and the rest. You wouldn't see Dylan deciding to write a piece of Schoenberg-inspired 12-tone serialism as an academic exercise – using every note in a chromatic scale – and ending up with a limpid, soulful waltz like "Still Crazy After All These Years". It's unlikely that Dolly Parton would have jammed with township musicians from Soweto and been inspired to sing about Elvis Presley's home in Memphis; a sixtysomething Brian Wilson wouldn't have written a salsa musical about a Puerto Rican murderer, a seventysomething Springsteen is unlikely to make an album on Harry Partch's microtonal instruments.

Simon's latest album continues that exploratory spirit. *Seven Psalms* is a cycle of seven songs presented as a single 33-minute track. The idea apparently came to him in a dream and, after a year of frequently waking in the dead of the night to scribble down lyrical ideas, it was completed exactly a year later, on the 25th anniversary of his father's death.

Simon is now 81, and *Seven Psalms* can certainly be seen as the summation of a career that has lasted more than 66 years. It draws together several recurring themes in his lyrics: religious imagery, secular hymns, reflections on death, lyrics that read like quizzical short stories. The album starts with "The Lord", a baroque-inflected two-chord piece that is repeated, with increasing urgency, several times throughout the album. It is a hymn that starts by attributing all beauty in the world to a cosmic creator. "*The Lord is a virgin forest, the Lord is a forest ranger*", he sings. "*A meal for the poorest, a welcome door to the stranger*". Then suddenly the mood shifts, the florid guitar becomes more strident and, instead of crediting this force of nature with miracle and wonder, Simon shifts from New Testament to Old and blames God for the world's evils – from disease to war to global warming. "*The Covid virus is the Lord/The Lord is the ocean rising/ The Lord is a terrible swift sword*".

The song references various moments in Simon's career. The medieval-sounding guitar riff is reminiscent of the "Anji" flourish that Davy Graham taught him 60 years ago; the liturgical air recalls both the first Simon & Garfunkel album and the more recent sardonic spiritual quest of *So Beautiful Or So What*. When Simon sings, "*The Lord is a face in the atmosphere/The path I slip and I slide on*", it's clearly a nod to "Slip Slidin' Away" and that song's cheerful meditation on the inevitability of death.

The mood lightens a little on the airy "Love Is Like A Braid", a major-key song where the lyrics of heaven and judgment are intoned arrhythmically, like an epic poem. By the time we reach the jokey, ragtime-inflected "My Professional Opinion", we can hear Simon almost beating himself up for the fruitless soul-searching of the previous songs. "*I'm gonna carry my grievances down to the shore, wash them away in the tumbling tide*", he coos. As another nod to the past, we can hear him playing the same percussive bass harmonica sound that we all remember from "The Boxer".

"Your Forgiveness" is the most ambitious song here – an episodic, flamenco-tinged piece, with baroque flutes that resemble the Andean pipes on "El Condor Pasa" and a harmonium drone from 1972's "Papa Hobo". As he ponders sin and forgiveness, the arrangement gets more complex – there is a baroque string quintet, featuring the theorbo, chalumeau and viola da gamba, as well as a subtly deployed arsenal of rhythmic instruments – temple bowls, gongs, frame drums, South Indian ektaras and bass harmonicas.

"Trail Of Volcanoes" is the most rhythmic track on the album, a single-chord drone based around some subtle West African percussion and a simple descending guitar riff, with lyrics that seem to be about immigration and asylum ("*Those old roads are a trail of volcanoes/ Exploding with refugees*"). It's also the first appearance of Simon's wife Edie Brickell, whose sparkling lead lines and playful harmonies are a welcome shard of light among the melancholy. She returns on the final track, "Wait", where Simon's narrator seems to be chaotically preparing for death ("*Wait, I'm not ready/I'm packing my gear*"). Yet there's a sense of resigned joy, as Simon moves into the pulsating 6/8 time signature he loves so much. "*I need you here by my side/My beautiful mystery guide*", he sighs, before Brickell joins him on the final verse. "*Heaven is beautiful*", she sings. "*It's almost like home*". It would be a magnificent way to end a magnificent career, but Simon probably has yet more ideas in him.

SLEEVE NOTES

1 The Lord
2 Love Is Like A Braid
3 My Professional Opinion
4 Your Forgiveness
5 Trail Of Volcanoes
6 The Sacred Harp
7 Wait

Produced by: Paul Simon and Kyle Crusham
Recorded at: Arlyn Studios, Studios At Fischer, Texas; Power Station, Reservoir Studios, New York; The Village Recorder, Los Angeles; Voces8 Centre, London
Personnel: Paul Simon (vocals, acoustic guitars, hi-strung electric, Dobro, baritone guitar, bells, gongs, frame drum, talking drum, gamelan, gobichand, cloud chamber bowls, bass harmonica, keyboards, glockenspiel, harmonium), Edie Brickell (voice), Jamey Haddad (hadphoon, hadjira, grand casa bass drum, almglocken), Voces 8 (vocals), Alex Sopp (flute), Nina Stern (chalumeau), Nadia Sirota (viola), Gabriel Cabezas (cello), Paul Morton (theorbo)

It draws together several recurring themes in his lyrics: religious imagery, secular hymns, reflections on death...

AtoZ

This month...

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THOMAS ADÈS/ LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC
Dante
NONESUCH
7/10
Epic ballet score from top British composer

Written to accompany Wayne McGregor's ballet production of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, this is an incredibly ambitious piece in three movements. The first, "Inferno", is a tone poem which references Liszt, Puccini, Berlioz and mid-20th century horror soundtracks. The woozier, more ambivalent second section, "Purgatoria", manipulates and distorts recordings of singers from the Great Ades Synagogue in Jerusalem (a place distantly connected to Adès's own Syrian Jewish ancestors) and sets them against Middle Eastern musical tropes. By the finale, the ecstatic, 27-minute "Paradiso", the music is radiant, spiralling, constantly modulating and verging on 12-tone serialism. These are pastiches, but they're incredibly well done.
JOHN LEWIS

THE ALARM
Forwards
TWENTY FIRST CENTURY RECORDING COMPANY
7/10
45 years in, still much to say

Surprisingly, considering The Alarm's firm place in early-'80s nostalgia, the Welsh band have been releasing a new album virtually every year of late. Basic, commonplace, hard-rock melodies abide, amid challenging lyrics probing fiercely into the world's new order. "Love And Forgiveness" and "Transition" are powerful highlights, but it all peaks with the closer, "New Standards", wherein Mike Peters sings "*Nobody's gonna stop the war*" while everyone lands in the bait.
LUKE TORN

SUAREZ/PRESS

EVA CAROLAN

BRIGID MAE POWER

Dream From The Deep Well

FIRE

8/10

Belonging, ancestry and a fresh breeze on her fourth. By Sharon O'Connell

THE self-titled record from singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Brigid Mae Power landed in 2016 with the grace and tremulous beauty of a butterfly, but carried with it the uncertain air of a recent storm. An understated yet resonant, folk-edged set, it was built from guitar, piano, strings, a prominent pump organ and Power's sweet, pure voice, all of which lent her songs of troubled relationships and maternal responsibilities an intense expression. Cultish acclaim followed – along with a degree of voyeuristic interest in her past, which she later laid bare in a distressing blog post.

Subsequent recordings have included further articulations of her emotional states and agency (or perceived lack of it), borrowing from the classicism of Joni and Neil, Tim Buckley's vocal style and dreamy, pastoral psychedelia. Folk traditionals have been a feature and in 2021 a covers EP paid homage to Patsy Cline and Dylan, among others. Now, shifting confidently between idioms and having made a kind of peace with her identity, Power looks poised to deliver to a wider audience.

There's always been a hazy and reflective feel to her songs, but despite the title, her fourth is Power's most resolute set yet. Though tidal drifting is still a feature and she's again drawing on both traditional and modern song forms, suggesting kindred spirits from Vashti Bunyan and Judy Collins to Laura Veirs, there's a new expansiveness in play. It's as if she's opened her chest to breathe deeper, all the better to vent emotions – disappointment, longing, quiet anger – but relate different stories, too. Production (shared with Peter Broderick, who's also prominent on the playing front) is warm and in-the-room intimate.

Despite having eight new songs ready, Power has said she felt "very unprepared" in the run-up to *Dream From The Deep Well*, even writing some lyrics the night before recording. The process itself, though, sparked enough new ideas to complete the set, which was recorded mostly live to tape. Three of the tracks are from home recordings, while introducing accordion, harmonica and brass helped Power give the album what she described to *Uncut* as "a different colour scheme". No loud primaries, of course, but some definite tonal brightening.

Belonging – ancestral, national, geographic – has long been a conflicted notion for Power, but here it's more a source of inspiration. She opens the set with a slightly eerie interpretation of "I Know Who Is Sick", an Irish traditional popularised in a much lustier form by The Clancy Brothers & Tommy Makem, and closes with the haunting "Down By The Glenside", an Irish Republican song from the '20s chosen for personal rather than political reasons.

Unsurprisingly, the fresh breeze blows stronger through the originals: "Counting Down" nods unmistakably to "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" but adopts an irresistible, country-pop swing that recalls a leaner Julia Jacklin. The song is a tender ode to maternal longing and domestic routine that also addresses Power's occupational dilemma: *"I'm not sure this is what it's cracked out to be/I'm meeting new friends that always have to leave/I'm considering a new career/But all I can do is play music by ear"*. "Maybe It's Just Lightning" is both personal and universal, inspired by the singer's early years as a single parent and, more recently, time spent with a mother and daughter from Ukraine. Set to a deceptively light, see-saw rhythm, it addresses the vastly underestimated maternal burden of (child)care and responsibility: *"Going through the unimaginable/Doubted, judged and blamed/But still devoting her time to keeping you safe"*.

The woozy sea shanty that is "Some Life You've Known", with pedal-steel, accordion and Mellotron, reflects on a sad parting and is an album highlight. Another is "The Waterford Song", which concerns Power's relationship with her father's Irish home and is driven by a strong psych-folk undertow over which her voice rises in a dulcet, wordless incantation. The album's other cover is of Tim Buckley's guitar-and-vibes evergreen "I Must Have Been Blind", a hushed, spell-binding version on piano, violin and synth, Power's voice suggesting a sweeter Judee Sill.

The title track lands late as the singer's rebuke to those whose actions don't square with their advocation of *"peace and love"*. That *"deep well"* is an enduring religious metaphor for redemption but rather than drink, Power encourages them to dream from it, thereby realising the potential of the human spirit in this world. Tradition, yes – but 21st-century realism, too.

SLEEVE NOTES

1 I Know Who Is Sick
2 Counting Down
3 Maybe It's Just Lightning
4 I Must Have Been Blind
5 Waterford Song
6 Ashling
7 I'll Wait Outside For You
8 Dream From The Deep Well
9 I Don't Know Your Story
10 Some Life You've Known
11 Down by the Glenside

Produced by: Brigid Mae Power & Peter Broderick
Recorded at: The Green Door Studio, Glasgow; home studio
Personnel: Brigid Mae Power (vocals, guitars, piano, Mellotron, organ, harmonica), Peter Broderick (drums, bass, violin, organ, synth, Mellotron), David Allred (trumpet), Hamilton Belk (pedal steel guitar), Conor O'Brien (flugelhorn), Daniel O'Sullivan (flute, guitar, synths, piano, autoharp, harmonium, percussion)

Q&A

Brigid Mae Power: "I have many different pools to draw from"

What does being an "Irish singer-song-writer" mean to you? It depends what day you talk to me on. I feel more confident in my identity now and I think that has happened through connecting more with my family history and geography. I moved to Galway as a child, from London; both my parents are Irish but not from Galway and I always felt on the outside there. It confused me and still does. "The Waterford Song" touches on these feelings of returning to where my father is from and feeling accepted there. The landscape there suits me and welcomes me when I go down. I've accepted that being Irish really has been the source of my musicality but it's not the entirety of it. I have many different pools to draw from experientially and feel at my best when not totally defined.

Why a cover of "Down By The Glenside"? My grandmother, who I was very close with, passed away last year aged 92. It was a song she used to sing at family gatherings. I was asked to sing it at her funeral, so I had learned it then and I've been singing it since. Her father was jailed for being an IRA messenger back in the '20s, so maybe that's why she liked to sing it. Mostly, it's just a nice song melodically. So I added it to my album as a nod to her and a thank you. I'm not trying to make a 100-year-old political statement!

INTERVIEW: SHARON O'CONNELL

THE ALBUM LEAF
Future Falling NETTWERK

6/10

Seventh album returns to more secure territory

Following 2016's cheerier, less distinctive *Between Waves* and his subsequent soundtrack work, Jimmy Lavalle returns to the more melancholic, considered pleasures of his 2004 breakthrough, *In A Safe Place*. With his Rhodes no longer receiving top billing, however, the emotional tug is less effective, and though trumpets offer "Stride" some redemption, "Cycles"' fuzzy tension remains unsatisfactorily unresolved, while "Give In" suggests an unfinished Air sketch. Still, it's not all instrumental: New Zealand's Kimbra provides the twilit "Afterglow" with tasteful vocals over a rhythm track beaten out on a piano frame, and Natasha Khan's gently treated voice floats atop another plush downtempo track, "Near". ***WYNDHAM WALLACE***

NICHOLAS ALLBROOK
Manganese
SPINNING TOP

7/10

Pond frontman brightens his darkest corners on fourth solo outing

On his fourth album made beyond the bounds of his reliably exuberant psych-rock outfit Pond, Nicholas Allbrook often displays an atypically heavy heart. Sorrow colours his remembrance for a late friend in "Jackie" and his references to Australia's history of environmental exploitation and its impact on the country's indigenous peoples in Manganese's title track. Elsewhere, Allbrook sings "The Endless Jetty" with an edge of desperation that evokes The Triffids' David McComb at his most wracked. Yet thanks to the casual brilliance of the musical settings and their ramshackle, trippy array of flute, horns and synths, the album's mood remains sprightly and inviting. ***JASON ANDERSON***

BAR ITALIA
Tracey Denim
MATADOR

7/10

Buzzy London-based newcomers show their stuff

Their name (that of a Soho café institution) and album title recall Pulp's interest in ersatz sophistication, but this trio play a very different game. *Tracey Denim* is a reintroduction – they released *Bedhead* in 2021, on Dean Blunt's label – but it delivers their woozy, monochrome and slightly introverted pop-rock aesthetic to a wider audience.

Beach Fossils: widescreen jangle

Two vocalists steer the songs through several miens, leaning on piano (Monade-like opener, "Guard"), artfully spindly guitar ("Nurse!", which suggests an indie-fied "Bull In The Heather") and '90s grunge ("Friends"), though dreamy, mid-paced numbers with nods to early Cure and The xx dominate. At 15 tracks it rather drags its anchor, but there's much promise here. ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

BEACH FOSSILS
Bunny
BAYONET

8/10

Indie auteur reaches for the gilded splendour of The Byrds and REM

Over a series of recordings dating back to 2010, Dustin Payseur has incrementally expanded Beach Fossils' sound from the lo-fi bedroom reveries of his debut LP to a widescreen jangle. *Bunny*, the proper follow-up to 2017's strings-enhanced *Somersault*, continues this evolution, unfurling with an intricate stateliness akin to that of the band's Brooklyn-based contemporaries Real Estate. On the filigreed dreamscapes "Don't Fade Away" and "(Just Like) The Setting Sun", Payseur's murmured vocals nestle cosily into the chiming dual-guitar interplay, exuding a half-awake languor that extends even to The War On Drugs-like motorik cruiser "Sleeping On My Own". Every moment shimmers with atmosphere, as the rippling melodies and contoured choruses enclose Payseur's knotty ruminations in sun-dappled serenity. ***BUD SCOPPA***

McKENDRICK BEARDEN
Bright As The Mines Out
SELF-RELEASED

8/10

Georgia guitarist goes solo, with startling results

A member of the Athens band Grand Vapids, who's worked with Faye Webster and toured as a guitar tech with Drive-By Truckers, McKendrick Bearden opens his solo debut with an ambient sonic collage called "Grace Henderson", which bleeds directly into the Southern glam stomp of "Continental". It's a dramatic transition – a quick study in contrasts – that showcases his stylistic range. *Bright As The Mines Out* is quietly adventurous: Bearden writes with the roomy melodicism of Red House Painters, and he favours finely grained guitar textures over pyrotechnics, which adds depth to the carefully observed details in "Shoulder Of Joy" and the devastating "Elkanoh". ***STEPHEN DEUSNER***

BLACK COUNTRY, NEW ROAD
Live At Bush Hall
NINJA TUNE

7/10

Ever-evolving young band commence a new chapter

In December, less than a year after the shock departure of frontman Isaac Wood, BC,NR performed this set of all-new material over three nights at west London's Bush Hall. With lead vocals now shared among the remaining sextet, the songwriting is impressively consistent, though heartbreaking piano-led epic "Turbines/Pigs" is a clear standout. Their angsty post-rock elements have been largely superseded by quivering/rousing chamber pop reminiscent of early Arcade Fire and Florence + The Machine, yet a weird emotional intensity remains – along with a talent for self-mythology that inspires audible devotion in an excitable crowd. ***SAM RICHARDS***

BLACK DUCK
Black Duck
THRILL JOCKEY

7/10

Cosmic and cinematic guitar explorations outta Chicago

The debut album from Black Duck, the trio of Douglas McCombs (Tortoise, Eleventh Dream Day), Charles Rumback and Bill McKay, offers ample proof of their comfort with each other: these eight instrumentals are gorgeous things, McKay and McCombs twining together on guitar while Rumback sketches out rhythms, or involved abstractions, at the kit. Much of the album seems haunted by the late, great Tom Verlaine – the filigree guitars on "Second Guess" flicker like lights threaded through clouds; glimmering noise flows like rapids. A fine album that suggests more pleasure to come. ***JON DALE***

DANIEL BLUMBERG
Gut
MUTE

8/10

Singer's thrilling internal combustion

In just a few years the singer and composer Daniel Blumberg has put together a striking body of work, one that shows he's not afraid to explore the darker aspects of humanity in a way that lays bare his own vulnerability. His third solo set, *Gut* is a natural abstraction of *Minus* and *On&On*, a beautiful six-song cycle that gives intense new meaning to the act of navel-gazing as he ruminates on the physical and metaphysical characteristics of the stomach. *Gut* continues Blumberg's work with Scott Walker producer Peter Walsh, and the parallels between the two artists is becoming clearer, particularly during the *Bish Bosch* belching of "Body". ***PIERS MARTIN***

BODY TYPE
Expired Candy
POISON CITY

7/10

Attitude-filled Aussies' ebullient second outing

After several years sharpening up their act in their native Sydney, this quartet made a splash over here and elsewhere with last year's full-length debut *Everything Is Dangerous But Nothing's Surprising*, and this follow-up keeps up the punk-pop momentum, not least on the faintly euphoric lead single and opener "Holding On". The Trump-baiting stomper "Miss The World" is another highlight, peppering the speakers with quick-fire lyrical smarts, and the indignantly ramshackle "Anti-Romancer" channels a grrrl pop tradition you can trace from The Slits through Sleeper to The Long Blondes. Sonic invention is not really a key concern here – it's indie-rock like Mum used to make, and comfortingly invigorating as such. ***JOHNNY SHARP***

EVAN JENKINS; SINNA NASSERI

Black Duck: heavy light

BRAIDS
Euphoric Recall
SECRET CITY

7/10

Fifth album from Canadian experimental trio

Fired by a new romance, singer/guitarist Raphaelle Standell-Preston calls *Euphoric Recall* her "love record", and the bliss is palpable in a vivid and lushly orchestrated eight-song symphonic pop suite. Sounding like Björk one minute ("Supernova") and Stina Nordenstam the next ("Evolution"), her distinctive vocals are buttressed as ever by the inventive beats of Austin Tufts and Taylor Smith's bold multi-instrumental textures, but it's the arrangements for cello, viola and violins that lend the songs their ethereal quality. Yet although these tracks are fluid and often meandering, they never lose their immersive, pulse-like groove. ***NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

BEN CHASNY & RICK TOMLINSON
Waves
VOIX

8/10

Acoustic-ambient experimental guitar duo strike out on their debut

Waves is the first collaboration between guitarists Ben Chasny and Rick Tomlinson. You'll know Chasny from psych-rock band Comets On Fire and the experimental folk of his solo project Six Organs Of Admittance, Tomlinson from Voice Of The Seven Woods/Thunders and albums under his name. The six instrumentals on *Waves* are largely defined by intricate, incantatory guitar interplay, as on the mesmerising "Wait For Low Tide". The exception is 16-minute droner "Paths Of Ocean Currents And Wind Belts", all processed guitar and tape loops brimming with tension and ambient textures. The spirit of *Waves* is one of cosmic cosiness, the sound of two friends talking late into the night.
ANA GAVRILOVSKA

CINDER WELL
Cadence FREE DIRT

7/10

Second album from itinerant folk singer-songwriter

Wandering far from the coastline of her Californian home, Amelia Baker washed up on the shore of West Ireland, settling awhile in County Clare. *No Summer*, her 2020 debut as Cinder Well, explored a bare-bones take on trad folk. Follow-up *Cadence* has a more colourful quality, a reflection perhaps of its recording in Hen House Studios near Los Angeles' Venice Beach. "Two Heads, Grey Mare" and "Crow" are subtly orchestrated, featuring electric guitar, brushed drums and occasional strings from Lankum's Cormac MacDiarmada. Baker's voice remains its most remarkable quality, though, beautiful but with a rawness that amplifies her songs' heavy melancholy. ***LOUIS PATTISON***

BEN CHASNY & RICK TOMLINSON

The experimental guitarists on their first collaboration

BEN Chasny and Rick Tomlinson have something incredibly specific in common: they both have photos of themselves as children wearing nearly identically constructed Halloween costumes. Chasny says, "It was like the past poking into the present and telling us, 'Do you guys get it yet? You are supposed to make a record together.'" Naturally, these photos are the front and back cover of said record, six instrumentals recorded at Tomlinson's house in Todmorden over three days.

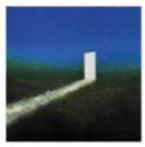
Their appreciation for each other's skills is all over the fluid tangles of interlocking guitars on *Waves*. They had recorded more guitar duo material, but Tomlinson says the record was pulling in a different direction, one that led them to the lengthy drone of "Paths Of Ocean Currents And Wind Belts".

Chasny says, "We both like to wander outside of the acoustic fingerstyle idiom, so this was a good way to expand the language." Tomlinson invokes nature when he adds, "Where I live, if you walk up to the moorlands on a sunny day, you can suddenly be immersed in the elements, the wind can really howl across the hilltops, and get you blindsided by a sudden ice storm." Such is the power and beauty of *Waves*.
ANA GAVRILOVSKA

CLOTH
Secret Measure
ROCK ACTION

8/10

Glasgow duo expand musical horizons on second album



On their 2019 self-titled debut album and last year's "Low Sun" EP, Paul and Rachael Swinton – the twin siblings and creative partners behind Cloth – turned elegant, insular electro-rock into a second language. On their full-length follow-up they blow the walls off their bedroom recording project, working with Bristolian producer Ali Chant to unlock a wilder and freer version of that sound. Airy melodies and Rachael's breathy vocals combine to create music that gets under the skin, but it's the gritty details – live percussion and improvised experimental flourishes, the cheeky synth line on minor-key power ballad "Pigeon" and otherworldly dulcimer-like santoor melody around which "Ambulance" solidifies – that linger.
LISA-MARIE FERLA

COWBOY JUNKIES
Such Ferocious Beauty
COOKING VINYL

8/10

Mournful chronicles delivered with delicacy

Following on from 2022's *Songs Of The Recollection* covers project, the Junkies' first album of original material in five years contains some of the group's most personal work. Siblings Margo, Michael and Peter Timmins process the last months of their father's life and his fading memories on the fractured snapshots of "What I Lost", while the fragility of familial relationships go under the microscope on the swirling folk-rock of "Hard To Build, Easy To Break". There are further musings on mortality, lyricist Michael again finding the perfect conduit for the salad-spinner of his innermost thoughts in Margo's strident but occasionally vulnerable vocals.
TERRY STAUNTON

RHODA DAKAR
Version Girl
SUNDAY BEST

6/10

Ex-Bodysnatcher covers Bowie, Gram and Morrissey, JA-style

Dakar gives a dozen songs reggae, ska or rocksteady covers, in a sort of musical autobiography showing the rich palette which fed into 2 Tone. She threads Lou Reed's vocal rhythm over the band's brisk skank on "Hangin' Round", while "Song To The Siren" and "The Man Who Sold The World" slip with similar ease into reggae mode. On "Everyday Is Like Sunday", inspired by the Pretenders version rather than its sometimes reggae-loathing author, her voice gives mournful balladeer weight to the English grey, *"sharing a greasy tea with me"*, 'til sun-kissed brass piquantly intervenes, sounding like a lost Special AKA song. ***NICK HASTED***

INDIGO DE SOUZA
All Of This Will End
SADDLE CREEK

7/10

North Carolina songwriter faces up to chequered past on third album

Although her 2021 breakout set *Any Shape You Take* explored past romantic travails, this Brazilian-American evidently still has ghosts to exorcise. When an electro beat kicks in on "Time Back" it promises to be a redemptive, life-affirming club banger. But then it breaks down and De Souza warbles shakily: *"You're bad, you suck, you fucked me up"*. She continues to leave metaphor at the door on "You Can Be Mean", her sardonic indie-pop recalling Liz Phair. But her vulnerability is more affecting on the wistful break-up anthem "Losing", before "Younger & Dumber" closes the set with a pedal steel-laced paean to the woman she used to be.
JOHNNY SHARP

Cowboy Junkies: musings on mortality

RICHARD MULHEARN; HEATHER POLLOCK

THE MURLOCS CAROLINE BAR ITALIA KOKOKO! DANIEL NORGREN PVA ELA MINUS (LIVE) OKAY KAYA
YUNÈ PINKU KING TUFF HMLTD MARIE DAVIDSON (DJ) ELKKA (DJ) CHARLEY CROCKETT GEESE MOIN
75 DOLLAR BILL NINA NASTASIA WUNDERHORSE JOHN FRANCIS FLYNN THE ANCHORESS HIGH VIS ULRIKA SPACEK
RUNNNER MACIE STEWART SAY SHE SHE LIME GARDEN YOT CLUB ALOGTE OHO & HIS SOUNDS OF JOY BIG|BRAVE
OREN AMBARCHI PERSONAL TRAINER PANIC SHACK MC YALLAH & DEBMASTER LOUIS CULTURE SAM BURTON
MASTER PEACE GENA ROSE BRUCE KATY KIRBY THEY HATE CHANGE MARINA ALLEN INDIGO SPARKE HORSE LORDS
TOM RAVENSCROFT (DJ) H. HAWKLINE SESSA INFINITY KNIVES & BRIAN ENNALS WHITNEY K DIVIDE AND DISSOLVE
MABE FRATTI ROYEL OTIS SAINT JUDE ADWAITH FRIENDSHIP FLOODLIGHTS FAT DOG SYLVIE GRETEL HÄNLYN
LAURA JEAN AVALANCHE KAITO SWEET BABOO MADMADMAD THE COURETTES LAUNDROMAT SIMON JOYNER
CHARLOTTE CORNFIELD DIVORCE BLUE BENDY HEARTWORMS ZEBRA JON MCKIEL JULIA REIDY CINDER WELL
KARA JACKSON MARY ELIZABETH REMINGTON CVC TEKE::TEKE MF TOMLINSON DONNA THOMPSON
ANGELINE MORRISON HÉLOÏSE WERNER & COLIN ALEXANDER DELILUH SYSTEM EXCLUSIVE SCOTT LAVENE TAPIR!
URSA MAJOR MOVING GROUP THE PRIZE MARY IN THE JUNKYARD THREE SPOONS JOYFULTALK OCTOBER BABY

LARMER TREE GARDENS
BLANDFORD FORUM
DORSET, UNITED KINGDOM

END of the ROAD

31 AUGUST TO
3 SEPTEMBER 2023

MARK DELLAS

LLOYD COLE

On Pain

TAPETE

8/10

A storied songwriter comes of age (again). *By Pete Paphides*

IN the autumn of 1984, abetted by his Commotions, Lloyd Cole coughed out a masterpiece called *Rattlesnakes*. In his black polo neck and corduroys, the video to "Perfect Skin" saw Cole looking and sounding like a man willing middle-age gravitas to come and get him. Meanwhile, he fetishised the dreams and disasters of the protagonists in stories by Raymond Chandler and Joan Didion. On *Easy Pieces*, released a year later, he sang about characters who struggled to come to terms with the bad decisions of their ruthless youth.

All of which is worth dwelling on because, in the intervening years, Lloyd Cole finally got to be the thing he so badly wanted to be from the outset. He got old – and when that happens to songwriters, they get a different sort of pass to the one that allows you to ride buses for free. People project onto you the depth that comes with mere survival. It's something Cole himself noticed in the last decade. After mid-life creative peaks such as *Music In A Foreign Language* came and went without much fanfare, 2013's *Standards* elicited not so much a Proustian rush as a Mexican wave of déja vû from returning fans who rightly held it up as a sonic postscript to that 1984 debut. As it turned out, *Standards* was something of a red herring. Now that Cole had our attention, with 2019's elegant, electronic *Guesswork* he set about creating music that couldn't be further removed from his precociously florid early work.

And it turns out that when you're pulling the weight of all that lived experience through life, the less you feel the need to elaborate. "*You can't believe it/It can't be possible/But it's happening now*", runs the entire lyric of "This Can't Be Happening", the sixth of the eight songs that comprise *On Pain*. Just those three lines over and over, occasionally accompanied by an impersonally unhuman female harmony, while tentative synth stabs search out a rhythm on which they might be able to ride out of this torment.

At moments like this, the space left by Cole turns the listener into collaborator. The shock of loss; the halogen glare of waiting rooms where people gather to hear the worst; a letter bearing unwelcome news. These are the scenes somehow implied here – and you can't help but fill them in. On "You Are Here Now", Cole begins like a man transmitting from a numbness that sits beyond emotion – "*Every day the same as every day before*" – before a slo-mo digital stampede vaults him into an apparent reconnection with the miracle of his existence. In these moments lies the validation of Cole's assertion that the only thing about the record that he wanted to sound organic were the sentiments that brought the songs to life.

SLEEVE NOTES

1 On Pain
2 Warm By The Fire
3 I Can Hear Everything
4 The Idiots
5 You Are Here Now
6 This Can't Be Happening
7 More Of What You Are
8 Wolves

Produced by: Chris Merrick Hughes
Recorded at: The Establishment, Massachusetts
Personnel: Lloyd Cole (guitar, vocals, synthesizers, programming), Blair Cowan (keyboards, programming), Neil Clark (guitars, keyboards, programming), Mark Frith (additional programming), Joan Wasser, Renee Le Bou, Dave Derby (backing vocals)

To which end, it's an Auto-Tuned iteration of the careworn Cole timbre that takes centre-stage on "I Can Hear Everything", the singer inhabiting the guise of a mildly exasperated God. It's not the only song here rooted in a feeling of fin de siecle fatalism. "Warm By The Fire" sounds like a companion piece to Cass Elliott's "California Earthquake", which Cole covered on *Standards* – only this time, the disaster is man-made, hence Cole navigating his lyrical drone over the shopping malls of an Los Angeles being set alight by insurrectionary influencers. It's good, but this rocky outlier doesn't entirely sound like it belongs among the sparsely ornamented electronic meditations that surround it.

Much better are the songs that bookend the album: revealed in a sultry fug of nocturnal humidity, "Wolves" offers a dreamlike reversal of the werewolf trope, while the album's exquisite title track finds Cole's consolation patter mirroring the music's cocooned queasiness. On a subdued celebration of Iggy Pop and David Bowie's mythical German sabbatical, "The Idiots", Cole sings, "*We'll move to Berlin/Stop being drug addicts/We'll cycle and swim*". Cole has frequently hymned the effect the pair's Berlin albums had on him, singling out that same unflinching minimalism he feels is so well-suited to writing from an older perspective.

Perhaps the most perfectly realised authentication of that claim comes with the penultimate song. Incredibly, seeds of "More Of What You Are" were sown in the same overheard conversation that spawned the Commotions' "My Bag", the observation that cocaine's primary effect is to make you "*more of what you are*". Over a balletically mesmerising tapestry of synths that evoke *Trans-Europe Express*'s quieter interludes, Cole extends that observation to the ageing process: the way the lines on our faces deepen and multiply with time, exaggerating the version of us that exists in the collective memory of our friends. Lloyd Cole is no exception. He, too, has become more of what he always was. And somehow he's achieved that by paring his music down to its rawest essence.

Q&A

Lloyd Cole "I'm getting my hair coloured this week for the first time since I was 21"

This album feels like a logical continuation of what you started with 2019's *Guesswork*.
I was trying to take the aesthetic and make it more extreme, so the dense stuff I wanted to be denser and the minimalist elements I wanted to be more minimal. [*But*] I don't think I'm ever going to make 'difficult' music, like maybe what Scott Walker made in his later years.

You started working on the songs before Covid stopped everything, right?
That's right. I realised I was going to lose my house if I didn't do something to start actually making money. And these days, making records actually loses you money. So I took about a year away, set up a Patreon site and embarked on this sort of multimedia memoir.

How are you finding your sixties?
Definitely better than turning 40 or even 50. I'm getting my hair coloured this week, for the first time since I was 21. I'm going to be onstage with a band for the first time in ages later this year. And I just thought, 'You know, I just want to *present* myself slightly more different.' And I've seen a colour I like that's kind of like gun metal. It'll be in keeping with the vocal treatments on the record – clearly artificial.

Do you think you'll ever move back to the UK?
Well, if you'd have asked me that before Brexit, I would have said definitely yes. I don't want to die in America. I've never taken American citizenship. But certainly, the affection that I have for the UK is focused mostly on Scotland these days. Brexit ruined so many people's lives. I can't tell you how it's ruined mine. It's cost me a fortune. *INTERVIEW: PETE PAPHIDES*

DJANGO DJANGO
Off Planet
BECAUSE MUSIC

8/10

Art-rock outfit embrace the full spectrum of dance music on ambitious latest

Spanning 21 tracks, on Django Django's latest you'll hear everything from '90s dance-pop to touches of house, techno, acid, hip-hop, avant-pop and everything else in between. Perhaps more dance-heavy than ever, it's a varied and bold record that genuinely rockets the band into new terrain – repeatedly. The Self Esteem-featuring "Complete Me" is an unshakable and euphoric piece of dance-pop, while "Don't Touch That Dial" featuring Japanese rapper Yuuko is a genuinely original and stomping piece of club music. While the lengthof the album is a little exhausting, there's no denying that this is the band's most accomplished and ambitious record to date. ***DANIEL DYLAN WRAY***

BAXTER DURY
I Thought I Was Better Than You
HEAVENLY

8/10

Deadpan singer confronts being a "budget nepo baby" on hip-hop-inspired latest

"A *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory* meets *Spirited Away* hallucination, chronicling a journey from childhood," says Baxter Dury of album highlight "Aylesbury Boy". Featuring singer JGrrey, with punchy yet sparse drums, a slick groove and Dury's distinct deadpan, it recalls his childhood experience of being sent to private school. Living life in the shadow of his father, Ian Dury, looms heavily on an album that is in many ways a soundtrack accompaniment to his 2021 memoir, *Chaise Longue*. It's more hip-hop-leaning than before, with snappy beats, melodic licks and idiosyncratic rhythms – as heard on tracks like "Shadow" – resulting in a vibrant record that is a self-deprecating yet poignant reflection on a complicated and chaotic upbringing.
DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

ELKHORN
On The Whole Universe In All Directions
CENTRIPETAL FORCE

7/10

Psych-folk duo mess with the formula, heading into a jazzier space

Elkhorn, the instrumental duo centred on the earthy acoustic 12-string of Jesse Sheppard and the questing electric six-string of Drew Gardner, aren't afraid to fuck with the formula. Case in point: on their new album, Gardner puts down his axe and picks up a pair of mallets, playing vibraphone (as well as overdubbed drums) throughout four expansive/exploratory numbers. It's to Elkhorn's credit, however, that *On The Whole Universe In All Directions* doesn't feel like too radical a departure. Gardner's vibes take Elkhorn into a jazzier space, while successfully retaining the cosmic chemistry that's made previous efforts so rewarding.
TYLER WILCOX

ROBERT ELLIS
Yesterday's News
NILES CITY

8/10

Stripped-down return to basics pays dividends on sixth studio set

Four years since the flamboyantly dressed *Texas Piano Man*, and now parted from longtime label New West, Robert Ellis heads back in the opposite direction here, with simple but persuasive results. *"My best days are gone/Feel empty and used/Got nothing left to lose"*, offers the title track, and while it's unashamedly lachrymose, it's likeable, shot through as it is with the streaks of self-mocking humour that have always characterised his songs. There and elsewhere, the instrumentation is also spare but effective, as plumes of double bass slide softly around under the delicate open-tuned fingerpicking of "Gene" and "Out Of The Woods".
JOHNNY SHARP

NOEL GALLAGHER'S HIGH FLYING BIRDS
Council Skies
SOUR MASH

8/10

Noel hits his solo stride, adding experimental grace notes to soaring tunes

The Gallaghers' hangover from Oasis's Britpop blowout has lasted over 25 years, but Noel moves past it here, reaffirming his faith in rock as transformative thrill, and adding atmospheric detours recalling late-period Weller and Bowie. "Dead To The World"'s melody hits a blindsiding emotional pocket, as Gallagher's airy, dislocated vocal floats over a slow swoon of strings. *"Don't know where I've been"*, he concludes, waking up. "Trying To Find A World That's Been And Gone" updates *Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads?*, considering the ruins of once familiar Manchester streets. Elsewhere, verses caress, choruses thrust, and "Easy Now" is pure Oasis. If you ever liked Noel, you might remember why.
NICK HASTED

Godflesh: experi-metal

GODFLESH
Purge
AVALANCHE

7/10

Third post-reformation album by Birmingham metal outsiders

Godflesh's 1989 album *Streetcleaner* was a watershed in extreme music, crossing the transgressive industrial sounds of Throbbing Gristle and Whitehouse with the heavy metal of their native Midlands. *Purge* marks Justin Broadrick and Ben Green's third album since they reactivated the group in 2010, and while it retains the defining quality of their sound – a caustic, downtuned guitar churn – it delves further into the group's experimentation with club rhythms. "Land Lord" sees the ever-present drum machine set to a boom-bap beat you could imagine an intrepid B-boy breakdancing to, while "Permission" gestures to '90s jungle, with Broadrick in the role of gruff-voiced hypeman.
LOUIS PATTISON

DANNY PAUL GRODY
Arc Of Day
THREELOBED

8/10

Beautiful concept album of guitar-led instrumentals

Californian guitarist Grody – once of Frisco post-rockers Tarentel – has developed into a writer of meditative solo albums, bolstered by guests on pedal steel, clarinet, drums and bass. These instruments provide definition and differentiation to the six tracks on *Arc Of Day*, which thematically follow the pattern of light through a day in the Californian countryside while metaphorically charting an emotional journey from dark to light. Jonathan Sielaff's clarinet spars with Grody's guitar on the beguiling "California Angelica", while Chuck Johnson's haunting pedal steel adds an unsettling element to "Cathedral Tree", but it's all centred round Grody's elegant, relentless playing.
PETER WATTS

SCOTT HAMILTON QUARTET
At PizzaExpress Live
PX

7/10

Tweedy American tenorist kicks off the London jazz venue's new label

Hamilton is a tenor saxophonist who consciously ignores the last 60 years of jazz history, playing in a big, breathy tone that's pitched somewhere between Ben Webster and Stan Getz. Since 1983, his second home has been the PizzaExpress Jazz Club on Dean Street, so it makes sense that the first release on that venue's label is a live set of Hamilton playing familiar standards ("The More I See You", "Pure Imagination" etc) with a British trio featuring pianist John Pearce. Hamilton's solos are good-natured, luxuriantly lazy and filled with witty musical references. Nobody is better at this stuff than him. ***JOHN LEWIS***

ALBERT HAMMOND JR
Melodies On Hiatus
RED BULL

7/10

Strokes mainstay throws a change-up on homemade double album

It doesn't take long to realise that Albert Hammond Jr is going for something different on his fifth solo album. Opener "100-99" starts out with a burst of the familiar metronomic rhythm guitar pattern that has powered The Strokes for 25 years but opens into a verse from rapper GoldLink, after which Hammond Auto-Tunes his lead vocal. Thereafter, he cranks up the synths and shreds over the thrum of a drum machine on a 19-song collection of home demos co-written with pop songwriter Simon Wilcox. The set offers power-pop gems like "Darlin'", a prospective Strokes classic in "818", the Cars-channeling "Never Stop" and the closing surprise "Alright Tomorrow", a disco burner sung by actress/vocalist Rainsford. Sounds like he's having a blast.
BUD SCOPPA

KIM SOLVE

LAURA CANTRELL

Just Like A Rose: The Anniversary Sessions

PROPELLER SOUND

8/10

First in nine years from roots-country favourite

INITIALLY conceived as a 20th-anniversary nod to 2000 debut *Not The Tremblin' Kind*, this first-rate studio return was derailed by the pandemic. *Just Like A Rose* is well worth the wait, though. Cantrell sees it as "more of a celebration than a traditional album", the sum of myriad influences and styles that have defined her career thus far, from Peel favourite to Grand Ole Opry performer to successful radio host on Gimme Country.

The protracted gestation of *Just Like A Rose*... also allowed her to bring in a wealth of guests, among them Steve Earle, Buddy Miller and rockabilly veteran Rosie Flores. The latter directly inspired the title track, a country-rock tribute to female singer-guitarists who continue to roar: "*Her colours are wild/Her ways are free*". Producer Flores and fellow guitarist Kenny Vaughan lock into a stinging rhythm, overlaid with Cantrell's clear, assured voice. A similar sentiment guides the airy "Unaccompanied", which revisits her formative days in New York City, riding the subway, catching gigs, immersing herself in music – "*On my own/Free to roam/All alone*" – its wistful sense of autonomy accentuated by pedal steel from David Mansfield, previously a mainstay of Bob Dylan's '70s ensemble.

Earle appears on "When The Roses Bloom Again", a majestic duet treatment of a vintage tune that Cantrell first cut for her second album, back in 2002, and which owes its arrangement to Jeff Tweedy (the Wilco leader had recorded it with Billy Bragg during the *Mermaid Avenue* sessions). It's brightened further by Buddy Miller's extended guitar break. "Bide My Time" is imbued with a satisfying twang, a gentle-ish paean to ramblin' country tropes, though the antique vibe is most apparent on "Good Morning Mr Afternoon". Written by Joe Flood and featuring Paul Burch and his WPA Ballclub, it's a leisurely exercise in old-school honky-tonk. It finds its greatest contrast in "AWM – Bless", a biting takedown of entitled, angry white maledom that couldn't feel more 2023.

ROB HUGHES

AMERICANA ROUND-UP

IT'S not all about Willie Nelson this year. Due on July 14, *Sticks And Stones* 6ACE RECORDS/THIRTY TIGERS marks the return of **Lukas Nelson + Promise Of The Real**. Self-produced with the band and written entirely by Nelson Jr, Lukas promises a celebration of "the human connection, joy and excitement. We went from quiet and introspective on 'A Few Stars Apart' to something big and fun... To me, this album is the perfect setlist." Lead single "More Than Friends" is a duet with **Lainey Wilson**, who attempted a modern take on Dolly Parton and Kenny Rogers. **Miles Miller** is known among country-leaning aficionados as sometime drummer, bandleader and harmony singer for Sturgill Simpson, as well as being a member of Town Mountain and holding down the beat for Tyler Childers. He also happens to be a highly skilled guitarist and singer-songwriter, as evinced by solo debut *Solid Gold* THIRTY TIGERS, due in early July. Simpson is credited as producer on a set seeded during the pandemic, when Miller finally found time to expand on song ideas that he'd been stockpiling for years. On the live front, there's still time to catch the underrated **Jerry Leger** on his UK tour this month. And after 25 years on the road, **Gretchen Peters** bids farewell to these shores, signing off at London's Cadogan Hall on May 26. "I expect it to be emotional, to say the least," she says.

ROB HUGHES

DAN ISRAEL
Seriously

PRIVATE LABEL

8/10

Latest from Minneapolis minstrel

For Dan Israel, song after meticulous song cover the stories of his life, from the personal, sarcastic and hilarious to the ethereal. "*Stupid is as stupid does*", says Israel on the title track, before wacky harmonies and wild guitars usher in the ups and downs, suggesting the melodic sense of Tom Petty. Elsewhere, there are more pensive moments ("Drove So Far"), while, in the Dylan-esque "Take Off Again", Israel claims: "*I don't need to be berated*".

LUKE TORN

JAMES
Be Opened By The Wonderful: 40 Years Orchestrated

VIRGIN MUSIC

8/10

James throw themselves a fancy 40th-birthday soirée

Even at their early, almost ascetic indie stages, James always had a sense of the epic about them. This 20-track 40th-anniversary self-celebration allows this tendency to be unleashed in full, as James revisit their canon in cahoots with a 22-piece orchestra led by Romanian-Mancunian violinist Andra Vornicu and the Manchester Inspirational Voices Choir. "Sometimes" re-emerges as a deadpan epic in the manner of The Go-Betweens, "Lookaway" comes up as a gentle countrypolitan masterpiece that Glen Campbell might have sung, and "Sit Down" works at least as well as self-effacing chamber pop as it ever did as gleeful stadium bombast.

ANDREW MUELLER

KAYHAN KALHOR & TOUMANI DIABATE
The Sky Is The Same Colour Everywhere REAL WORLD

9/10

Stringed magic from virtuoso globalistas

The kora has proved to be extraordinarily adaptable in dialogue with non-African instruments, and here Diabaté teams up with Iran's Kalhor, the world's foremost player of the kamancheh, or Persian spike fiddle. Middle Eastern and West African traditions intertwine seamlessly on a set of thrillingly intuitive improvisations on which the two instruments sound as if made for each other. Try "Wayfarers Of The Legends", beginning with a mournful, desert blues-like phrase from Kalhor which Toumani answers with eloquent, rippling minor-key arpeggios, or "Whereto", on which it's the kamancheh which replies to the kora's opening soliloquy with a melody of classical lyricism. Just glorious.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON

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Donny McCaslin: stretching jazz

KILLING JOKE
In Dub Rewind Vol 2
KILLING JOKES RECORDS/CADIZ MUSIC

7/10

More hardcore dub remixes of Killing Joke floor-fillers

The four extremely different members of Killing Joke have often said that just about the only form of music they can listen to together is dub. In 2021, the group released the first volume of dub remixes of KJ classics such as "Eighties", "Requiem" and "Love Like Blood", with this second volume of Youth's remixes containing new versions of "Change", "Bloodsport", "Autonomous Zone" and two takes on "Pssyche" among others. The band have always combined an oppressive, paranoid atmosphere with a fantastic groove, and these remixes enhance both those aspects, thereby retaining the band's core attributes while rendering the tunes themselves barely recognisable and occasionally terrifying. ***PETER WATTS***

KING KRULE
Space Heavy XL

6/10

Archy Marshall gets spacey and hazy on woozy fifth LP

Composed while living between Liverpool and London, *Space Heavy* is intended to capture the feeling of existing in between spaces. The result is an album that employs Marshall's typically woozy, dreamy soundscapes, where stripped-back guitar lines wrap around his half-muffled vocals. The opening "Flimsier" does a nice job of merging the pleasingly melodic with the intentionally wonky, setting the tone for an album that at times feels like a deconstructed Durutti Column record. There are jazz flourishes ("When Vanishing") and the occasionally more up-tempo indie-leaning moments ("Hamburgerphobia"), but ultimately it's a record that happily exists in something of a fog – wilfully embracing hazy, almost groggy textures. ***DANIEL DYLAN WRAY***

JENNY LEWIS
Joy'All BLUE NOTE/EMI

8/10

Lewis turns a homework assignment into an instant classic

In early 2021, Lewis joined an online songwriting symposium hosted by Beck, and was tasked with writing a song a day for a week, to specific guidelines. Joy'All is perhaps most evocative of Lewis's 2006 Watson Twins collaboration *Rabbit Fur Coat*, although the totemic garment this time is the one Lewis wears on the cover – an outfit once owned by Skeeter Davis, whose spirit Lewis ably channels throughout. Highlights include the distinctly Davis-ish "Apples And Oranges", the spectral soul of "Giddy Up", and the country trundle of "A Puppy & A Truck", which adds to Lewis's canon of great opening lines: "*My forties are kicking my ass/And handing 'em to me in a margarita glass*". ***ANDREW MUELLER***

MAMAS GUN
At PizzaExpress Live PX RECORDS

7/10

London funk quintet captured live

Somewhat taken for granted as blue-eyed retro-soul revivalists, you only realise how good these Londoners are when you hear them live. Frontman Andy Platts touts a pastoral take on '70s funk, idly drifting from elastic tenor to ecstatic falsetto, referencing the likes of Marvin Gaye and Timmy Thomas so casually that it comes as a shock to hear him josh with the audience in the plainest of English RP accents. The band, featuring guitarist Terry Lewis and pianist Dave Oliver, are impeccable and, on tracks like "I Need A Win" and "Let's Find A Way", provide remarkably tight gospel harmonies. ***JOHN LEWIS***

DONNY McCASLIN
I Want More EDITION

8/10

Polyglot player's eloquent latest; Dave Fridmann produces

Saxophonist and flautist McCaslin has long-standing form as a band leader and sideman, but is best known outside jazz circles for his work on Bowie's *Blackstar*. Three collaborators on that record join him for this thrillingly charged, hybrid set, which stretches the definition of jazz much like the UK's "new breed" players – with its synths, staccato sax blurts and sub-bass wobble, "Body Blow" recalls The Comet Is Coming. "Fly My Spaceship", though, is a loose-limbed blend of sci-fi dub and calypso, while the moody "Big Screen" deploys a head-nodding beat threaded with synth, over which exultant sax soars. ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

MEMORIALS
Music For Film: Tramps!/ Women Against The Bomb
THE STATE51 CONSPIRACY

7/10

Seasoned post-rock duo's cinematic score project

Multi-instrumentalist Verity Susman, formerly of Electrelane, collaborates with Wire guitarist Matthew Simms on this double album of soundtracks composed for two recent documentaries. The tracks from Kevin Hegge's New Romantic scene memoir *Tramps!* feel richer, combining drone-heavy analogue electronica, musique concrète, art-punk and free jazz elements with lustrous ambient sound paintings. The score for Sonia Gonzalez's anti-nuclear protest chronicle *Women Against The Bomb* takes a more literal-minded, lo-fi indie-folk approach on respectful retro-pastiche campfire songs like "March To Greenham" and "Women Standing Strong", with occasional post-rock detours like "We Will Fight" to remind listeners this isn't actually an archive reissue from 1983. Overall, a thoughtful and engagingly eclectic debut. ***STEPHEN DALTON***

NATURAL INFORMATION SOCIETY
Since Time Is Gravity
EREMITE/AGUIRRE

8/10

Transcendent collective music from Chicago ensemble

Since 2010, Joshua Abrams has plied his trade at the centre of Natural Information Society, an open-ended outfit Abrams defines as "ecstatic minimalism". Jazz is a core component, but it'd be deceptive to call *Since Time Is Gravity* a jazz record, exactly. Abrams' instrument of choice is the guimbri, a hide-covered African lute, and songs like "Moontide Chorus" and "Murmuration" revolve on cyclical grooves that spark with bright horn leads. There are star turns from figures like the veteran tenor saxophonist Ari Brown. But this is a collective, community affair – never more so than on "Stigmergy", which sees multiple instruments feeding into a single, glowing master melody. ***LOUIS PATTISON***

MESHELL NDEGEOCELLO
The Omnichord Real Book
BLUE NOTE

6/10

New label and new sound for versatile veteran

Ndegeocello's last album, 2018's *Ventriloquism*, was a collection of covers of songs by the likes of Sade, Tina Turner and Prince, but her Blue Note label debut finds the neo-soul queen turned jazz diva back in compositional mode. The result is an intriguingly hybrid set, ranging from Afro-futurism ("Georgia Avenue"), electro ("The Invitation") and cosmic jazz ("Call The Tune"), to off-kilter pop ("Gatsby", which features Joan As Police Woman) and jazz-inflected hip-hop ("Clear Water"). On first hearing it's a little underwhelming, but its subtle charms certainly grow. ***NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

O'HOOLEY & TIDOW
Cloudheads
NO MASTERS

8/10

Exquisite songcraft on Yorkshire folk duo's seventh album

The first studio album from Belinda O'Hooley and her wife Heidi Tidow since they found acclaim for their theme tune to BBC/HBO drama *Gentleman Jack* is stuffed full of tenderly poetic and sometimes dramatic songs, about being first-time parents, the natural world around them and much else besides. The harmonies are as gorgeous as you'd expect given O'Hooley's past with the Unthanks, the piano-based songs evoke Kate and Anna McGarrigle's early records, the arrangements for strings, clarinet and flugelhorn are hauntingly elegant and *Gentleman Jack* star Suranne Jones adds her voice to the plaintive "Ballad Of Anne And Ann". ***NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

O'Hooley & Tidow: in harmony

DAVE STAPLETON; HANNAH WEBSTER

DUDU TASSA & JONNY GREENWOOD

Jarak Qaribak

WORLD CIRCUIT

8/10

Love songs to the Middle East. *By Tom Pinnock*

THE Middle East is, to put it lightly, a complex region; especially so if you expand your view to include Arabic North Africa and the land stretching across to the Oxus, most of which comprises the 'Middle World' according to writer Tamim Ansary. It's an area that's been crucial to humanity, historically a cradle of civilisation, culture and learning, yet in recent centuries it's been repeatedly failed, pillaged and divided by poor rulers and imperialist outsiders.

Yet one thing that vaguely unites the Middle East, despite its myriad peoples and cultural currents imprisoned in often arbitrary national boundaries, is music. Most strikingly, their strong modal sense, with melodies slipping fluidly between major and minor keys, and their use of quarter-tone tuning, can make conventional Western melodies and harmonies sound more than a little stiff. Only the 'blue note' in blues comes close to the ache and bittersweet longing found throughout Middle World music.

It's little surprise, then, that Jonny Greenwood has come to be fascinated with this music; always an intrepid musical explorer, he's further connected to it through his marriage to Israeli artist Sharona Katan. "It's such passionate music," he tells *Uncut*. "[*The tunings*] just sound right to me: perhaps they were exotic – a horrible word – when I first heard them, but now they're just... correct."

He has form with this kind of thing, as on *Junun*, a 2015 collaboration with Israel's Shye Ben Tzur and India's Rajasthan Express. This outfit supported Radiohead live after *A Moon Shaped Pool*'s release, along with another group, Dudu Tassa & The Kuwaitis. A Tel Aviv rock singer-songwriter, Tassa is descended from the Al Kuwaiti Brothers, pioneering musicians in Iraq and Kuwait who moved to Israel in the '50s. His Kuwaitis project covers and updates the work of his grandfather and great-uncle, but here he and Greenwood cast their eyes over the whole of the Middle East, excavating often-obscure songs from the past 70 years (including by Tassa's ancestors), and recruiting eight phenomenal singers from different MENA countries to interpret them in their own way. So, for instance, there's UAE's Safae Essafi interpreting an Israeli song, Iraq's Karrar Alsaedi taking on a Yemeni piece and Tassa himself singing a Moroccan song.

Greenwood and Tassa have been keen to make clear that these are love songs rather than protest anthems. Indeed, the album – its title translates as 'Your Neighbour Is Your Friend' – is an open-hearted, optimistic reminder of what unites the region in the face of the kind of oppression that's seen at least one of these vocalists suffer historically due to their choice of collaborators.

While the vocalists are the focal points on *Jarak Qaribak*, Greenwood and Tassa provide many of the most important textures here. Every song is built on drum machines and buzzing modular synths, recorded in Oxford – a subtle electronic tapping is the first sound we hear on the opening "Djit Nishrab", an Algerian song performed by Egyptian Ahmed Doma, while "Ya 'Anid Ya Yaba", a Jordanian song sung by Syrian artist Lynn A, stutters into life with a collapsing drum-machine clatter. Most of the nine tracks here blossom into rich layers of sound, often led by echoed spirals of ragged, picked electric guitar and funky, overdriven bass. Both recall Greenwood's work in The Smile – that band's "A Hairdryer" could have slotted into *Jarak Qaribak* without issue – so it's surprising to learn that Tassa and Greenwood shared guitar and bass work.

On top of this more modern bed are traditional instruments, including qanun, oud, brass, percussion and copious Arabic strings (not, this time, arranged by Greenwood). The pair mostly resist the temptation to take the spotlight, leaving the eight singers to weave their spells. To Western ears, of course, they share many qualities, but there are striking differences: Baghdad's throaty, passionate Karrar Alsaedi is heavy on the microtones, Sfax's Noamane Chaari and Zaineb Elouati are pleasingly reserved and keening, Aleppo's Rashid al-Najjar is impassioned and gloriously untethered, and Palestine's Nour Freteikh and Dubai's Safae Essafi are breathily, beautifully melismatic. The latter's "Ahibak" ('I Love You') is perhaps the record's highlight, a seductive slice of Levantine R&B, its syncopated beat fighting through droning horns, echoed stabs of strings, jangling qanun and Greenwood's dub effects.

The importance of the vocalists is underlined by the spoken introductions to each song, with the title of the track, the singer's name and their city of origin. It's a throwback to the same practice on some of the old recordings Greenwood and Tassa love, and a sign of their reverence for this music. That *Jarak Qaribak* manages to combine that respect – for the songs, the singers and their various cultures – with a free-flowing, light sense of exploration that feels joyfully current, is its triumph.

SLEEVE NOTES

1. Djit Nishrab (feat Ahmed Doma)
2. Ashufak Shay (feat Rashid Al Najjar)
3. Taqou-Dub (feat Nour Freteikh)
4. Leylet Hub (feat Mohssine Salaheddine)
5. Ya Mughir al-Ghazala (feat Karrar Alsaadi)
6. Ahibak (feat Safae Essafi)
7. Ya 'Anid Ya Yaba (feat Lynn A)
8. Lhla Yzid Ikthar
9. Jan al-Galb Salik (Noamane Chaari & Zaineb Elouati)

Produced by: Dudu Tassa & Jonny Greenwood
Recorded at: studios in Tel Aviv, Oxfordshire and across the Middle East
Personnel includes: Jonny Greenwood (guitar, bass, synthesisers, electronics), Dudu Tassa (guitar, bass, vocals), Ahmed Doma, Rashid Al Najjar, Nour Freteikh, Mohssine Salaheddine, Karrar Alsaadi, Safae Essafi, Lynn A, Noamane Chaari, Zaineb Elouati (vocals), Ariel Qassis (qanun), Niran Basson (introductions)

Q&A

Dudu Tassa and Jonny Greenwood

You've shied away from this being seen as a message of peace and friendship, but of course there's nothing wrong with that...

GREENWOOD: No, there isn't anything wrong, exactly... but we went into this as an arrangement project, rather than anything political. We just love these songs.

TASSA: There is something important, challenging and beautiful in this project. If there is something here that will promote some kind of process between people in the Middle East, of course it will be wonderful, but first of all it is about [our] love for Arab music.

How did you divide the work between you?

TASSA: We started in Oxford and Jonny had the idea to do everything with drum machines. He asked me, "What are the rules for the album?" I have never worked in this way, and it was amazing... Jonny just led it to this place.

GREENWOOD: We both played bass and guitar, and suggested chord progressions and instruments to one another.

How do you deal with quarter-tones on the guitar?

GREENWOOD: How do you introduce conventional western harmony to music that is so far outside major/minor tonality? And, should you? But then, all this was explored in the Arab world in the '50s and '60s: there's electric guitar on Umm Kulthum's masterpiece "Inta Omri", and piano all over Mohamed Abdel Wahab's records. Neither of those masters had a problem using instruments that can't play the same pitches you hear on oud or qanun.

INTERVIEW: TOM PINNOCK

SHINKATAN

Sons of the Shoals: (l-r) Sadler Vaden, Chad Gamble, Jimbo Hart, Jason Isbell, Derry deBorja

JASON ISBELL & THE 400 UNIT

Weathervanes

SOUTHEASTERN

8/10

Former Trucker still striving to exceed his own expectations. *By Andrew Mueller*

JASON ISBELL'S first couple of solo albums after leaving Drive-By Truckers in 2007 had their moments – "Dress Blues", "Streetlights" – but also sounded like someone trying to teach himself a trade he wasn't altogether convinced he was cut out for: the hammer landed on the thumb nearly as often as the nail. But the period since Isbell hit his stride properly on 2011's *Here We Rest* now demands to be considered one of the great decades (and a bit) assembled by a solo artist. It's not fanciful, at this point, to invoke Bruce Springsteen from *Born To Run* to *Tunnel Of Love*, or Warren Zevon from his self-titled second LP to *Sentimental Hygiene*.

Weathervanes is another imperious demonstration of Isbell's signature ability to simultaneously project confidence and vulnerability, both musically and lyrically. In many respects, it's Isbell doing more of what we well understand that he does: these are stories of the lonely, confused and frightened, Isbell himself occasionally among them, set to supremely articulate country soul, delivered with the kind of voice – as both singer and writer – which was always likely to acquire greater gravitas as its owner grew older.

It is replete with what we might now think of as Isbellisms. There is the fondness for playing with place names, as heard on the Springstonian "King Of Oklahoma" ("*She's going back to Bixby/ Tired of tryin' to fix me*"). There is the tantalising diversion into unregenerate boogie, "This Ain't It" stepping into the part previously played by "Super 8" and "24 Frames". There are the plots that might have been plucked from the pages of yellowing diaries or local newspapers: the terrified teenagers trying to correct a mistake in "White Beretta", and the John Prine-ish "Volunteer", in which Isbell flaunts his reporter's knack for the crisp opening line with "*Daddy worked hard/ Mama worked harder/Propped up on pain, pills and pride*".

Isbell also continues – as do Drive-By Truckers – to step up against certain views which might be assumed to be at large in the audience of a country-ish singer from Alabama. "Save The World" is, at one level, a protest song railing at the bizarre trade-off that many of Isbell's fellow Americans have made, to value a particular narrow interpretation of a 232-year-old constitutional amendment above the safety of schoolchildren. But it's smarter and deeper than that, digging into the fear that congeals the heart of even the most reasonable parent, Isbell wondering, "*Can we keep her here at home instead?*"

It's accompanied by an appropriately feverish riff, time kept by nervous snare, before cresting with what at least sounds like the sadly lesser-heard harmonising twin guitar solo.

"When We Were Close" is an elegy for the late Justin Townes Earle, who had a previous cameo in Isbell's "New South Wales", a semi-rueful account of a dissolute Australian tour. This sequel – perhaps counterintuitively – is a more raucous, even exuberant affair, amidst which Isbell negotiates a balance between affection and anger, while juggling an amount of survivor's guilt ("*You were bound for glory and grown to die/But why wasn't I?*").

He's as powerful as ever in lower gears too: "If You Insist" is a wry summary of a moribund romance, Isbell's past-caring barbs ("*I'm too tired to get excited/And I'm too old to be ashamed*") offset by Amanda Shires' weeping fiddle. "Vestavia Hills", named after the fancy Birmingham, Alabama, suburb in which its narrator is now comfortably ensconced, is an ambiguous reproach of an up-and-comer by a rock'n'roll aristocrat who sounds unsure whether he's worried or jealous; it rides one of those patent Isbell choruses which manages to be both anthemic and understated.

None of which is to suggest that Isbell is – like his correspondent in Vestavia Hills – phoning anything in from recline atop his laurels: *Weathervanes* has all the twitch and twinkle of an artist still striving to exceed his own expectations. Aside from everything else, it contains at least one signpost towards intriguing further horizons: opening track "Death Wish" recalls a few previous mid-paced character studies of the vexatious ex who cannot or will not help themselves – it might almost be a companion to "How To Forget" – but is shrouded in sumptuous strings which ease Isbell closer than he has been yet to Billy Sherrill-style countrypolitan balladry. On the strength of "Death Wish", it has to be hoped there will be more where it came from.

SLEEVE NOTES

1 Death Wish
2 King Of Oklahoma
3 Strawberry Woman
4 Middle Of The Morning
5 Save The World
6 If You Insist
7 Cast Iron Skillet
8 When We Were Close
9 Volunteer
10 Vestavia Hills
11 White Beretta
12 This Ain't It
13 Miles

Produced by: Jason Isbell
Recorded at: Blackbird Studios, Nashville
Personnel: Jason Isbell (vocals, guitars), Jimbo Hart (bass), Derry deBorja (keys, vocals), Sadler Vaden (guitars, vocals), Chad Gamble (drums), Amanda Shires (fiddle, vocals), Mickey Raphael (harmonica), Sylvia Massy, Ian Rickard (vocals), Morgan O'Shaughnessey (strings)

Q&A

Jason Isbell: "All my songs have real people in them"

Has your relationship to the characters in your songs changed over the journey – do you see different things in the kids in "White Beretta" than you might have 10 or 15 years ago?
Certainly, yes. I don't think those characters could've existed for me a decade ago. I would've been too angry with both of them.

Is it fair to hear "Save The World" as an oblique protest song about school shootings?
I think that's fair. I tend to go personal with protest songs. It's hard to argue with first-person experience.

"When We Were Close" is your elegy for Justin Townes Earle – was it hard distilling that relationship into a song?
All my songs have real people in them, and pretty much all those relationships are complicated. This one has been more complicated than most, but that's why I'm a songwriter. That's the whole point – sorting through it and making it rhyme.

For non-Alabamans, can you explain the significance of the setting of Vestavia Hills?
It's shorthand for a fancy place. Lotta nice houses. No need to be miserable riding around in a van when you have a nice home that your wife pays for in Vestavia Hills.

How weird is watching a whole documentary – HBO's *Running With Our Eyes Closed* – about yourself? Not as weird as living your life with cameras pointed at you, knowing a documentary is coming.

INTERVIEW: ANDREW MUELLER

DANNY CLINCH

Kassa Overall: a different drummer

KASSA OVERALL
Animals WARP

7/10

Jazz meets hip-hop on eclectic, guest-heavy album from drummer

Talented and dynamic jazz drummer Kassa Overall has jampacked his latest album with guests. Over 12 tracks, everyone from Danny Brown to Shabazz Palaces to Laura Mvula swing by. The result is a widely diverse record that moves between tones, tempos, genres and voices. The smooth "Ready To Ball" is an immediate earworm, gliding between restrained yet forceful jazz rhythms and gently swaggering hip-hop beats. This middle ground between jazz and hip-hop is the crux of the record, and while it's loaded with deft playing, rich production and complex compositions, the constant rotation of differing voices can often kill the flow and coherence of what is otherwise a meticulously crafted record. ***DANIEL DYLAN WRAY***

SARAH PAGÉ
Voda BACKWARD MUSIC

9/10

Haunting, primordial harp evocations

Montréal-based harpist Sarah Pagé makes exploratory music best suited for deep listening. On her new full-length *Voda*, named after the Russian word for water, she delicately yet furiously evokes the element's twin possibilities of rebirth and ruination. In addition to Pagé's spectral harp, instrumentation includes a cornucopia of haunting sounds extracted from bass, cello, violin, koto, electronics, oak branches, water bowls and waterphone. "Rousalka", inspired by Mikhail Lermontov's poem "The Mermaid", is folk horror in song form, while on "Premiers pas au Marécage" the harp's natural delicacy floats into frame like it's coming up for air. *Voda* is a cathartic listen, intensely elemental yet not without its moments of peace. ***ANA GAVRILOVSKA***

ARLO PARKS
My Soft Machine TRANSGRESSIVE

7/10

Soaraway Gen Zedder's second; Phoebe Bridgers guests

Two years on from her Mercury-winning debut, Arlo Parks is again engaging with the uncertain and painfully messy business of navigating young adulthood. These 12 songs also lay bare her anxieties and vulnerabilities, but with producers including Paul Epworth and Ariel Rechtshaid on board, she's switched the exclusively soft focus of bedroom pop for more varied and robust settings. Parks' warm, cooing tone adapts easily to the changes – they're most striking on "Devotion", which throws to US '90s grunge-pop, "Blades" (liquefied West Coast funk) and "Impurities", whose soundbed suggests Japan reared on hip-hop. Eyes may be on the US market, but the honesty of Parks' expression holds. ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

PERE UBU
Trouble On Big Beat Street
CHERRY RED

7/10

David Thomas on irascible form with his own song cycle

Pere Ubu's music remains as difficult to define as it was nearly 50 years ago when they released their debut single, "30 Seconds Over Tokyo". *Trouble On Big Beat Street* is David Thomas's much-belated response to hearing Van Dyke Parks' *Song Cycle*, and succeeds through David Thomas's bravery: "Love Is Like Gravity" bursts with ideas, melody and invention; "Nyah Nyah Nyah" is as wonderfully obnoxious as the title suggests and, although the record is unlikely to convert any sceptics, the presence of wide-eyed improviser Alex Ward gives Thomas the perfect foil. ***JACK MILNER***

TOMMY PRINE
This Far South
NAMELESS KNIGHT/THIRTY TIGERS

8/10

Sadness prevails: rookie musician's response to losing his dad

Arriving as a fine lyricist at age 27, Tommy Prine mixes wicked garage-rock rhythms ("Elohim") with quiet folk melodies ("Boyhood") on his debut album. Prine is clearly an articulate writer, using introspection and irony to deal with broken hearts. His vocals, responding to all the weird life turns of late – not least losing his famous father John Prine to Covid – hit hard in the hearts of listeners. "*The world lost one of the greatest songwriters of all time, but I lost my dad*", he sings in "By The Way". ***LUKE TORN***

PROTOMARTYR
Formal Growth In The Desert
DOMINO

8/10

Frantic, deep sixth album from Detroit punks

Protomartyr swapped Detroit for Texas's Sonic Ranch to record their sixth album, and the cathartic desolation of the Tex-Mex border seeps into the music – as referenced by the title. Joe Casey draws on personal trauma in this occasionally harrowing listen, with tracks like "Elimination Dances", "The Author" and "3800 Tigers" finding a balance between The Clash, Mission Of Burma and Slint, combining echoey space with angular guitars and Casey's edge-of-oblivion vocals. Following the pattern of 2020's *Ultimate Success Today*, this is more expansive and less claustrophobic than previous Protomartyr releases, but no less intense. ***PETER WATTS***

RVG
Brain Worms
FIRE

7/10

Melbourne quartet expand their brand of post-punk and college rock

On the Australian band's first two albums, RVG demonstrated a flair for a variety of gloomy post-punk grandeur rarely achieved since the Bunnymen declared it was heaven up here. Yet frontwoman Romy Vager may be as surprised as anyone that a more hopeful and accepting disposition emerged in her pandemic-era songwriting sessions, even if her lyrics' caustic sense of humour remains one of her band's strongest virtues. And just as the keening synths accentuate the note of romantic yearning in "Tambourine", Vager's talent for Grant McLennan-esque melodicism shines through in "It's Not Easy" and "Giant Snake". Elsewhere, the songs' sense of drive and drama demonstrates RVG's growing confidence. ***JASON ANDERSON***

RVG: on the increase

RAIN PARADE
Last Days Of A Dying Sun
FLATIRON RECORDINGS/LABEL 51

7/10

First in 37 years for Paisley Underground stalwarts

Rain Parade co-leader Matt Piucci's long-term day-job as a DNA expert on trials such as OJ Simpson's somehow fits a band whose pinnacle was 1984's glowering, bad trip epic "No Easy Way Down". Its producer Jim Hill returns for a record also loyal to psychedelic tropes and muscular melodies. The best tracks gently slip their moorings, as with the sour fuzzed guitar and damaged lyrics of "Got The Fear", and hazy warp and alchemical concerns of the insinuatingly addictive "Green". "Bring You Back"'s bright psych-pop shows Rain Parade's sunnier side. "Share Your Love" seeks "*to talk about the past and how it never lasts*". Here, though, is an unexpected afterglow. ***NICK HASTED***

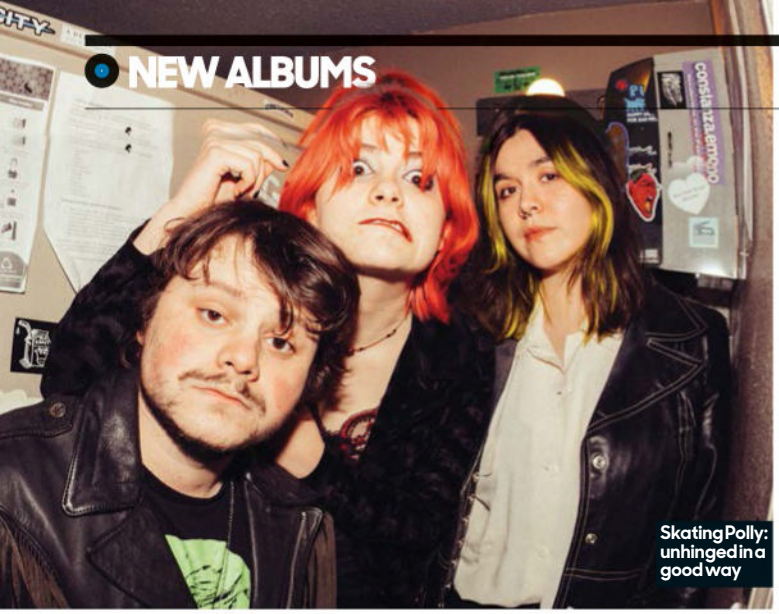
STELLA ROSE
Eyes Of Glass
KRO

7/10

Full-length debut by the New York-raised goth

The debut LP by Dave Gahan's daughter sounds little like Depeche Mode, and instead explores several shades of goth: from gothic folk to gothic metal to gothic soul. Rose switches between three vocal registers – the folksy, masochistic, waltzing opener "Maid For You" features a bored-sounding teenage drawl; on the sub-dom role-playing grindcore of "Faithful" she adopts a shrieking, petulant yelp; on the Winehouse-meets-Hawley 6/8 ballad "Jane" she switches to a wayward, soulful howl (the hard-rocking "Where Was I" combines all three). Yves Rothman's production, from the woozy ambience of "Slowdown" to the skittery trip-hop of "Clean", is impeccable. ***JOHN LEWIS***

IZZIE AUSTIN; PATRICK O'BRIEN SMITH


Skating Polly: unhinged in a good way

SKATING POLLY
Chaos County Line
EL CAMINO

7/10

Oklahoma sibling trio pack it all into sprawling sixth album

It's been five years since *The Make It All Show* – the biggest gap between albums since their 2010 debut – and Skating Polly are determined to fill you in on all of it. So *Chaos County Line* is an 18-track behemoth that sometimes feels even longer as the trio – stepsisters Kelli Mayo and Peyton Bighorse, and Kelli's brother Kurtis on drums – spin songs on their head, twisting brat-punk singalongs into crunchy hard rock exorcisms (see the deliciously unhinged "Baby On My Birthday"). Stick with it, though, and there are plenty of mixtape moments to be had: the tender "Masquerade" and cheeky kiss-off "I'm Sorry For Always Apologising" are highlights of an LP that's cluttered, incoherent and frequently quite brilliant.
LISA-MARIE FERLA

SQUID
O Monolith
WARP

8/10

Quintet's inscrutable widescreen funk

Brighton post-rockers Squid are a stunning jam band whose expansive second album wades deeper into the mire kicked up by their top-five debut, the knotty and knowing *Bright Green Field*. *O Monolith* channels the shapeshifting patterns of Steve Reich and late-period Radiohead to fashion a kind of lush English pastoral that seethes and shimmers at every turn, the likes of "Siphon Song" and "After The Flash" evoking the furrow-browed splendour of These New Puritans' *Field Of Reeds*. Singing drummer Ollie Judge still commands a funky situation – "Undergrowth", "Green Light" – but this new set, like some giant obsidian obelisk, seems reassuringly unknowable. ***PIERS MARTIN***

SHAKIN' STEVENS
Re-Set BMG

7/10

Feisty country rock and family remembrances

The career revival kickstarted by 2016's Top 30 *Echoes Of Our Time* steps up a gear with Shaky's most varied – and personal – set of songs yet. The retro rock'n'roller of old is nowhere to be heard on the opening "George", the singer accompanied by sparse piano on a hymnal ode to an uncle with mental health problems, while his mother is the inspiration for "May", a powerful excursion into gothic country. Those country hues collide with the rock sensibilities of John Fogerty on the likes of "Dirty Water", and "Not In Real Life", the oaky Stevens vocal a solid, expressive Americana entity.
TERRY STAUNTON

ROB ST JOHN
Örö BLACKFORD HILL AUDIO

9/10

Multimedia project inspired by wild Finnish island

Acclaimed musician and artist Rob St John's latest project is one inspired by his time on a small island in southern Finland that was originally a military base and is now a nature reserve. The full project includes a film, 100-page artist's book and a 7" lathe-cut vinyl single containing two pieces – the unsettling "Midwinter" and warmer "Midsummer", both recorded by St John with Pete Harvey on cello, and Andrew Wasylyk on piano and synth. These twin musical compositions are augmented by four field recordings capturing myriad sounds of life and nature on the island. ***PETER WATTS***

SWANS
The Beggar
MUTE

8/10

Definitely not for the fainthearted

"*Cut open your belly, look into my eyes*", Michael Gira sings on "The Parasite", the opener to his 16th Swans album, again favouring malevolent, double-tracked drawls over seductive whispers. Certainly, the brooding title track's "*shithead unforgiven*" is in no mood for compromise – there's a 43-minute version too – and even casts himself as Jesus on the (relatively) muted, nauseous "Why Can't I Have What I Want Any Time That I Want?". What sometimes seems like attrition – "Paradise Is Mine"'s relentless hammering, "Ebbing"'s pounding 11 minutes – can, nevertheless, deliver a ritualistic euphoria, and "No More Of This"' climactic choirs and chimes suggest a Satanic Christmas lies ahead.
WYNDHAM WALLACE

TAJ MAHAL
Savoy
STONY PLAIN

8/10

Legendary bluesman swings out

You'd imagine Mahal's roots lay in the blues, but his parents met one night when Ella Fitzgerald was playing the Savoy in Harlem, and he actually grew up listening to jazz and big band records. Here, he pays tribute to the music of the swing era with cool versions of standards by the likes of Gershwin, Benny Goodman, Ellington and Louis Jordan. Backed by crack rhythm and horn sections, backing vocalists and veteran Leonard Cohen/The Band producer John Simon on piano, he executes the best scatting since Louis Armstrong, while the overall mood sits somewhere between Dan Hicks & His Hot Licks and Dr John's *In A Sentimental Mood*. Finger-poppin' fantastic.
NIGEL WILLIAMSON

THE TELESCOPES
Of Tomorrow
TAPETE

8/10

Gorgeous drone-pop nuggets, 15 albums in

While The Telescopes have taken on many different shapes and sizes over the years, from a psych-pop five-piece to a noise duo, the core of the group has always been Stephen Lawrie, and his vision has always been The Telescopes' guiding aesthetic. There's a touch of the obsessive about his music, continually worrying away at a clutch of basic but endlessly regenerative ideas, and *Of Tomorrow* feels like a return to core principles – simple Velvets chords, guitars that clang and drone, humming keyboards and Lawrie's extinguished vocal drawl. Deeply hermetic then, but catchy as hell, too.
JON DALE

TEMPS
Party Gator Purgatory
BELLA UNION

6/10

James Acaster's cast of celebrity cooks spoil an ambitious broth

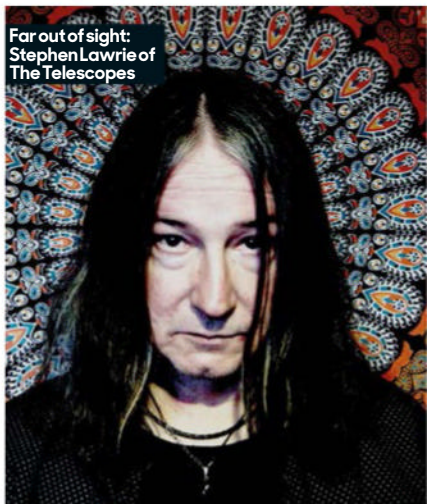
Although comedian James Acaster's plan to make a documentary about his attempts to move into the music industry were aborted during the pandemic, he salvaged a bunch of his and Seb Rochford's drumbeats, to which he has since curated a clutch of recordings by dozens of his favourite artists under the Temps umbrella. Yet while the shapeshifting polyrhythms sometimes solidify this wildly eclectic material into fleeting grooves – where "lookaliveplaydead" is blessed with Quelle Chris's intriguingly languid topline vocal melody, and Xenia Rubinos lends sultry trip-hop allure to "partygatorR.I.P" – elsewhere, drumkit-falling-down-the-stairs rhythms, random free-jazz non-sequiturs and unremarkable freewheeling raps leave us with a rather underwhelming mess.
JOHNNY SHARP

THE VAN PELT
Artisans & Merchants
GRINGO

7/10

Cultish NJ vets' first in 26 years

In overviews of the alternative '90s, The Van Pelt seldom warrant a mention, likely due to their short run (just four years) and a hybrid style – post-hardcore, art-punk, emo and indie rock – that defines them in terms of others. Some might say their third LP simply switches one set of influences for another, but that ignores the skewed new pleasures of a bliss pop-dazed Pavement and *Bummed*-era Mondays with Modest Mouse topspin. Their observational lyrics also resonate, especially on meta narrative "Punk House" and the autobiographical "Did We Hear The Same Song?", which bites "Marquee Moon" while namechecking its makers, alongside *Astral Weeks* and Tears For Fears.
SHARON O'CONNELL


Far out of sight: Stephen Lawrie of The Telescopes

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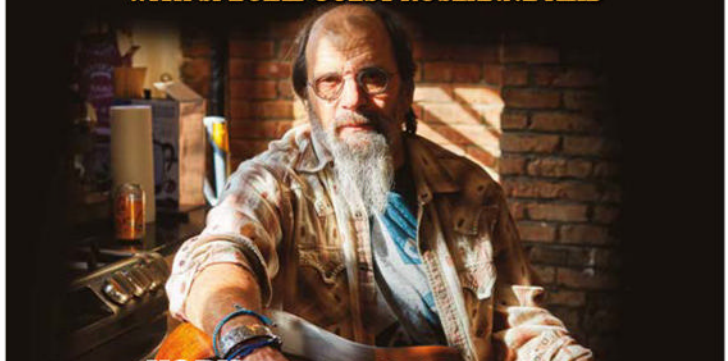

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RUFUS WAINWRIGHT
Folkocracy BMG

7/10

Back to folk camp for Kate and Loudon's boy

From operas to Judy Garland tributes, Wainwright has travelled a long way from familial origins, but here returns to his roots with 14 reimagined folk and folk-rock classics featuring a star-studded guestlist. He puts a uniquely Rufus twist on the likes of "Shenandoah" and "Wild Mountain Thyme", of course, singing them in his best operatic tenor with a touch of John Jacob Niles. Standout duets include "High On A Rocky Ledge" with David Byrne, the ethereal "Going To A Town" with Anohni, the string-laden "Heading For Home" with John Legend and a joyous take on John Phillips' "Twelve Thirty" with Sheryl Crow and Susanna Hoffs as surrogate Mamas. ***NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

WARRINGTON-RUNCORN NEW TOWN DEVELOPMENT PLAN
The Nation's Most Central Location
CASTLES IN SPACE

8/10

Artfully presented, politically inspired retro-futurism

Like its predecessors and their distinctive artwork, Gordon Chapman-Fox's mischievous fourth album harks back to an era when our future dreams promised shopping schemes, but viewed from a contemporary perspective in which 'levelling up' remains an unfulfilled catchphrase. Further muddying historical waters, its vintage synths will be as familiar from Jean-Michel Jarre and Vangelis records as Survive's *Stranger Things* soundtrack and Nils Frahm's recent releases. The latter's most evident on the richly textured "Daresbury Laboratory", but overall the carefully contrived atmosphere is of both optimism and dread, with "Rocksavage" pairing ice cream van melodies and persistent, pulsing bass, as if Tufty's time is up. ***WYNDHAM WALLACE***

WESTERMAN
An Inbuilt Fault PARTISAN

7/10

Athens-based Londoner's quietly commanding second

"*I don't know who I am any more/Forgot what I was looking for*", croons Will Westerman on "A Lens Turning", whose understatedly groovy and slightly mournful art-pop charms suggest his loss was this record's gain. Its nine songs were built around Westerman's experiments with looping and programming, which gives his sound a newly urgent and athletic drive without diluting his emotional candour or dumping his spirit guides – Peter Gabriel, Bon Iver, Mark Hollis and John Martyn. There's a lot to like, and though "Pilot Was A Dancer" runs close to standard, indie folk-pop fare, the title track, with its Fairport-ish twangling and braided harmonies, and the wintry, Croz-styled "Give" compensate. ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

RICHARD LEA-HAIR

REVELATIONS

WARRINGTON-RUNCORN NEW TOWN DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Something out of nothing with Gordon Chapman-Fox

Although Chapman-Fox's music may appear to represent a wistful journey back to synth music's early days, it's motivated by something more consequential: the UK politician's invariably ineffectual commitment to social equality. "There's a definite political undercurrent to all the albums," he says. "The concept of *Warrington-Runcorn New Town Development Plan* is that it's nostalgic for a future that never happened. The new album got its name from a 1980s ad campaign from local property developer Eileen Bilton, which was accompanied by a slogan of "London's moving our way" [*another song title*]. This touched on contemporary ideas of the north-south divide and government programmes of 'Levelling Up' or the 'Northern Powerhouse', all of which seem empty promises, which brought us back to the Thatcherite policy of 'Managed Decline' for Merseyside."

This certainly accounts for the LP's pervasive undercurrent of disquiet, but there's an upside to such reminiscences. "I was speaking to a guy who grew up in Runcorn," he says. "He was convinced I'd sampled a factory on the Astmoor estate in the '80s. The thumping, groaning sound was the exact one he remembered. It took me a while to convince him I'd made the sound myself!" ***WYNDHAM WALLACE***

LUCINDA WILLIAMS
Stories From A Rock'N'Roll Heart
HIGHWAY 20/THIRTY TIGERS

8/10

Still brassy, and brushing aside health setbacks

Since suffering a stroke in 2020 Williams has had to reassess her approach to making music, but there's little on her 16th album to suggest it's anything other than business as usual. Granted, she's been unable to contribute guitar, but both Stuart Mathis and Doug Pettibone admirably take up the slack on lean, mean rockers (the Stones-like strut "Let's Get The Band Back Together") and more bluesy excursions ("This Is Not My Town") alike. Other guests, notably Springsteen on the imagery-laden "New York Comeback", add their own textures, but the attitude is all Lu's, as disarming and defiant as ever. ***TERRY STAUNTON***

JESS WILLIAMSON
Time Ain't Accidental
MEXICAN SUMMER

8/10

Rootsy singer-songwriter lets loose on audaciously candid fifth solo set

On her first album since her collaboration with Waxahatchee's Katie Crutchfield as Plains, Jess Williamson seems not just freed up but unleashed. A hunger for life experiences courses through *Time Ain't Accidental*, from the romantic intensity of the title song and the mating dance of "Topanga Two Step" to the post-break-up emptiness of "A Few Seasons" and her quest for "the real thing" in "Hunter". Plains producer Brad Cook surrounds Williamson's forthright drawl with banjo, Dobro and pedal steel over electronic grooves – notably the iPhone-app drum machine from her home demos – and the LP plays like the soundtrack to a pedal-to-the-metal road trip between Williamson's LA base and her native Texas, desert air whipping through the open windows. ***BUD SCOPPA***

WITCH
Zango
PARTISAN

8/10

The return of a foundational Zamrock band

Formed in the early 1970s after Zambia gained independence, Witch were a pioneering band in what became known as Zamrock, a unique blend of psychedelic rock, hypnotic funk and traditional African rhythms. In the early 2010s, founding member Emmanuel "Jagari" Chanda reunited the group to tour Europe and Africa, which was chronicled in the 2017 documentary *We Intend To Cause Havoc*. The reunion culminates in this supremely satisfying comeback album: punching up the tempos and streamlining the grooves, *Zango* draws on familiar Zamrock sounds while adding some new twists, like the wild drums that roll through "Unimvwesha Shuga" and the gospel drama of "Waile". ***STEPHEN DEUSNER***

YUSUF/CAT STEVENS
King Of A Land
BMG/DARK HORSE

8/10

Lyrically teasing exercises in self-examination

Ahead of his appearance in this year's Glastonbury "legends" slot, Yusuf breaks ground with an album he describes as "a mosaic... of where I've been and who I am". Certainly, the opening "Train On A Hill" checks in on the folk grandeur he peddled to great effect on his early-1970s high-water marks, while hinting at various crossroads he's faced along the way. There are even more palpable nods to the past on the warzone eulogy "The Boy Who Knew How To Climb Walls" and the multi-tracked voices of poverty ode "Another Night In The Rain". As autobiographies go, it's fairly oblique but no less intriguing for it. ***TERRY STAUNTON***

Single-minded: Bettye LaVette

BETTYE LAVETTE

LaVette!

JAY-VEE

9/10

Late-blooming soul singer makes the best album of her six-decade career. *By Bud Scoppa*

IN 1972, Bettye LaVette cut *Child Of The Seventies* for Atlantic Records in Muscle Shoals surrounded by the most fabled of Southern session aces – only to have her hopes dashed when the label inexplicably chose to shelve it. The Detroit native spent the next three decades exiled in the farthest fringes of the music biz, singing for her supper in thousands of dives and lounges.

LaVette received some much-deserved attention in classic-soul circles in 2003 when *A Woman Like Me*, her first album of newly recorded material since 1982, got her a WC Handy Award for blues comeback album of the year. Two years later, she got some serious R.E.S.P.E.C.T. for the critically acclaimed *I've Got My Own Hell To Raise*, produced by Joe Henry – who'd helmed Solomon Burke's 2002 comeback album *Don't Give Up on Me* – and containing LaVette's primal interpretations of songs from female writers of every stripe save R&B, though it's very much an R&B album.

For her 2007 follow-up, *Scene Of The Crime*, LaVette was teamed with the Drive-By Truckers, whose Patterson Hood co-produced and co-wrote the aptly titled "The Battle Of Bettye LaVette" with the intense, demanding singer. That album cemented her unlikely status in the indie sector, ensuring that this "old woman", as she called herself – the defiant twinkle in her eye at odds with the dismissive self-reference – would never again have to scrape by in obscurity.

Between 2010 and 2020, the single-minded interpretive singer released five LPs, drawing on a wide-ranging array of source material. The last two, 2018's Dylan-dedicated *Things Have Changed* and 2020's *Blackbird*, a collection of ballad standards, were produced by the in-demand Steve Jordan, who co-produced and drummed on Keith Richards' three solo LPs before The Rolling Stones enlisted him following Charlie Watts' death.

LaVette and Jordan deepen their relationship considerably with *LaVette!*, released on his own Jay-Vee label. Surprisingly, the album's 11 were songs written by Randall Bramblett, a low-profile, Athens-based writer/artist/musician whom she calls "the best songwriter I've heard in the past 30 years". For the project, Jordan put together a best-in-the-business studio band anchored by bass player Pino Palladino, guitarist Larry Campbell and keyboard player Leon Pendarvis – all of whom had played on *Things Have Changed* – plus guitarist Chris Bruce and a three-piece horn section featuring sax great James Carter (LaVette's friend dating back to their Detroit days), with a bunch of all-stars sitting in on individual tracks.

Jordan and his crew spent a day at LaVette's home in New Jersey, where they homed in on the key and rhythm she wanted for each song as she ran through the material for them. The players then deftly tailored the arrangements to her cues at NYC's Electric Lady Studios, after which LaVette, still recovering from a bout of Covid, performed her vocals to the tracks at home – though the airtight immediacy of the finished album belies the circumstances of its making.

LaVette! opens with "See Through Me", which gets a Little Feat-evoking treatment, right down to Campbell's downshifting slide guitar. On the seething "Don't Get Me Started", Bettye, her studio band and Steve Winwood on the B3 conjure the chugging groove and counterrhythmic ornamentation synonymous with Memphis' Hi Records, as Bettye channels Ann Peebles' gritty stoicism. "Lazy (And I Know It)" is fittingly laid-back, with Palladino, Jordan and Bruce providing the ultra-spare backdrop to LaVette's knowing performance of the self-mocking lyric.

From there, the vibe gets progressively funkier with the Allman-esque shuffle "Sooner Or Later", the strutting "Plan B" and the gospel-tinged "In The Meantime", John Mayer's Strat solo mirroring LaVette's hopeful resilience. On the electrifying "Mess About It", another Detroit pal, Ray Parker Jr., peels off chicken-scratchin' rhythm guitar chords and Jon Batiste takes a lustrous piano solo. The horns power "Hard To Be Human", with Carter doubling on baritone and tenor sax. The album ends with the ballads "Not Gonna Waste My Love" and "It's Alright", the latter a meditation on loss with LaVette at her most nakedly emotional as she puts her whole being into the refrain, "*It's alright, the tears that you're cryin'/I'm cryin' too/A world full of promises/It's a world full of lies*".

Throughout, LaVette's connection with Bramblett's hard-scrabble lyrics and soulful melodies is downright telepathic; lines like "*Danglin' on a string, mumblin' a prayer/My mojo's busted and I ain't got a spare... I ain't got no Plan B*" forcefully and eloquently encapsulate her life and career, as she makes them both a rueful acknowledgment of her struggle and a celebration of survival. Choosing to devote an album to Bramblett's songbook was inspired, because his work delves into universally relatable emotions and situations – the place where LaVette lives. As this late-career instant classic makes emphatically, delectably clear, LaVette remains at the peak of her considerable powers at the age of 77. We should all be as full of life as this feisty "old woman".

SLEEVE NOTES

1 See Through Me
2 Don't Get Me Started
3 Lazy (And I Know It)
4 Sooner Or Later
5 Plan B
6 Concrete Mind
7 In The Meantime
8 Mess About It
9 Hard To Be A Human
10 Not Gonna Waste My Love
11 It's Alright

Produced by: Steve Jordan
Recorded at: Electric Lady Studios, NYC; vocals recorded at Funky Joe's, NYC
Personnel includes: Bettye LaVette (vocals), Pino Palladino (bass), Steve Jordan (percussion), Leon Pendarvis (keyboards), Larry Campbell (guitars, lap steel, pedal steel, cittern), Chris Bruce (guitars), Clifton Anderson (trombone), Kevin Batchelor (trumpet), Ron Carter (saxes), Ray Parker Jr. (guitars), Steve Winwood (Hammond B3), Jon Batiste (piano), John Mayer (guitar), Pedrito Martinez (percussion), Monte Croft (vibes)

Q&A

Bettye LaVette: "These songs weren't written for me, but they're exactly what I would say"

What inspired you to devote an entire album to Randall Bramblett's songbook?
I've been telling everyone that he writes my life. He writes actual stories that have beginnings and such an understandable middle that you can just about figure out the end. But they're songs for adults, and those are hard to find for me now.

How did you wind up on Steve Jordan's label?
When Verve didn't pick up my contract, it was over again as far as I was concerned. And Steve called and said, "Fuck these people – I'll pay for it." I said, "Well, if you're in The Rolling Stones, I guess you could maybe afford to do that." And he said, "Why don't you find a writer that you really like and have him write you some songs?" And I told him I had one.

You really put your heart and soul into "It's Alright". Steven wanted to keep the first take, but I sounded like a crying drunk. I was pretty tipsy, but oh God, the song broke my heart; I just could not sing it. So when I finally got to the place where I could just distract myself a bit, we did another take, but I only did it twice – the crying one and the one that you hear. ***INTERVIEW: BUD SCOPPA***

DANNY CLINCH

AR KANE

AR Kive ROCKET GIRL

Three dreamy releases from 1988/'89. *By Jon Dale*

REISSUE OF THE MONTH 9/10

DREAM POP, they called it. Given AR Kane's Alex Ayuli once worked for advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi, it's no surprise that he and collaborator Rudy Tambala invented their own genre before critics could stick their oar in. It was a canny move, but more importantly, it was *accurate*: the music of AR Kane was made for dreamers, by dreamers, and its languor and longing made it particularly bewitching listening; their music is often smeared and blurry, happily lost in its own indefinable pleasures. "We wanted dream pop," Tambala says, "that feeling of a dream where the rules are different. Dream logic."

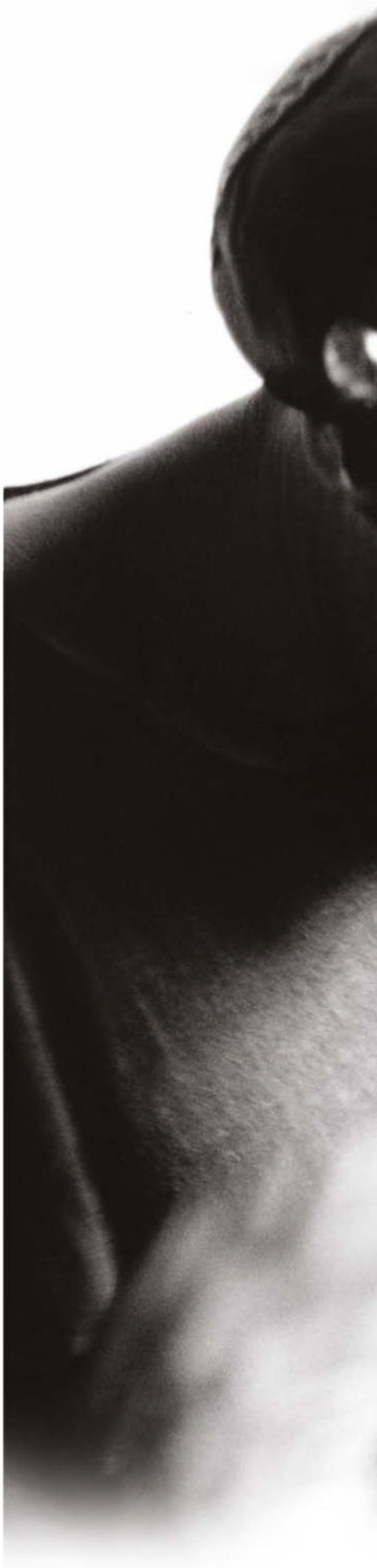
The ARKane story is one of experimentation and enterprise, of unexpected developments, of willing the future to accord with one's bidding. It's also one of smart moves and headstrong independence, bordering at times on intransigence: Ayuli and Tambala were full of cocksure youthful energy, something you can hear across the material compiled in this *AR Kive* boxset. Collecting three of their six releases across 1988 and 1989 – the "Up Home!" EP, debut album *sixty nine*, and double-album *i* – the music contained in *AR Kive* is swarming with great ideas, wild juxtapositions and brilliant pop moments, where AR Kane's songs overflow with melody. The key to everything here, though, and the reason why it all works so well, is the near-telepathic communication developed, over two decades, between the group's core members.

Ayuli and Tambala grew up in east London, the children of Nigerian and Malawi-English parents, respectively, meeting at Park Junior School in Newham when eight years old. Their shared experience as outsiders with keen creative interests, and their grounding in soundsystem and jazz-funk club cultures, granted them the confidence of the misfit, but seeing the Cocteau Twins on *The Tube* was the moment their switches flicked. After the performance, they called each other via landline, marvelling over what they'd seen, convinced they could do something similar.

Soon, Tambala met Ray Shulman, an ex-member of Gentle Giant who'd moved into production; when Shulman's wife asked what Tambala did, he bluffed that he was in a band, though AR Kane barely had any songs. A hastily arranged demo landed the duo an audience with the One Little Indian label, whose Derek Birkett said, "You're shit. Let's make a record."

That first EP, 1986's "When You're Sad", led AR Kane to legendary indie 4AD, where Robin Guthrie of the Cocteau Twins produced the following year's "Lollita" EP. They also collaborated with Colourbox on a dance record, M/A/R/R/S's "Pump Up The Volume" – no-one expected it to hit No 1 worldwide. The resulting legal and inter-personal complexities torpedoed their relationship with 4AD.

Those first few EPs hinted at ➤



MICHAEL BENNETT

Rudy Tambala and Alex Ayuli: near-telepathic communication

AR Kane's capabilities. "When You're Sad" had them tagged in the music press as the 'black Jesus & Mary Chain', but "Lollita" and "Pump Up The Volume" proved there was a lot more happening in AR Kane's world, and in interviews, they feigned ignorance of indie, claiming their influences were Weather Report and Basement 5. But "Up Home!", their third EP and first for new label Rough Trade, is where everything comes together. Originally demoed for 4AD, those recordings convinced Rough Trade's Geoff Travis to sign the duo. It's no surprise, given the ambition of the four songs – there is, quite simply, so much going on here.

Everything on "Up Home!" is bigger, richer; the guitars are huge, as though they're being played through the clouds, massive gusts of blue-green noise that move across the stereo spectrum like weather systems. "Baby Milk Snatcher" is built around face-flattening dub bass, with glinting piano and shards of guitar ricocheting through the song. "W.O.G.S." is delirious to the point of expiration; "One Way Mirror" is their attempt at weird, lopsided 'anti-funk', the song's melody crushed by avalanches of six-string interference. And the closing "Up" is AR Kane's masterpiece, a disembodied thud pulsing at its heart as a six-note guitar melody spirals ever onward, Ayuli's voice lost in its own reverie, hymning escapism via references to Jamaican political activist Marcus Garvey's 'black star line'.

Indeed, one thing that makes AR Kane stand out from many of their peers is explicit politics. While other guitar groups of the time, like MBV and Dinosaur Jr, embraced vagueness and the unreal, Ayuli and Tambala's experience as black artists in whitewashed British culture granted them political smarts. "Baby Milk Snatcher" collapses sexuality and Margaret Thatcher, its title referencing her early 1971 decision to eliminate free milk for junior school students. The eroticism was lifted from reading JG Ballard, who once daydreamed about "the arch of [*Thatcher's*] nostrils and the sheen of her lower lip."

Collapsing the sexual and the political is part of what made "Up Home!" so unique. By the time of their debut album, *sixty nine*, though, AR Kane's music changed, yet again. Here, the duo have gone astral, pointing to the outside world ("The Sun Falls Into The Sea"), but they've also internalised, exploring psychological states. That inward focus makes sense, given the LP's recording sessions, the duo hidden away in the basement of Ayuli's mother's house. There's something hermetic about *sixty nine*, and it is the purest expression, perhaps, of Ayuli's and Tambala's vision.

There are great pop songs throughout, beautiful melodies like "Crazy Blue" and "Scab", but the LP is most powerful when AR Kane push the boat far, far out. "Suicide Kiss" dissolves midway into a fury of punch-bagged drums and overloaded amplifiers; "Sulliday" lets go of structure, mapping chaos via feedback and muttered come-ons. But the album's centrepiece is a triptych on Side Two, where their songs dissolve together. The drift song of "The Sun Falls Into The Sea", with its guitars that refract and shiver, a burbling clarinet wandering through a heavenly landscape as Ayuli murmurs, descends into the troubled "The Madonna Is With Child", a stark piano-led mantra shattered by ice-pick guitars.

Listening back to *sixty nine*, it's striking how important the bass guitar is to the music's engine, from the slippery ECM-warble across "Crazy Blue" to the thrumming pulse through "Spermwhale Trip Over". If AR Kane made the guitar mysterious again, they also situated the bass at the core of their music, its lifeblood. You can also hear that through their 1989 double-album, *i*, where AR Kane shift into another gear. If *sixty nine* was a cloistered, covert collection of songs, *i* is its opposite – 26 tracks, ranging from five-second snippets of guitar feedback to the six-minute penultimate dub-scape, "Catch My Drift".

i suggests AR Kane could have been pop contenders, if they'd been more focused, but its lack of attention span is its eventual triumph. It flicks through genres like a child impatiently thumbing a kineograph, from the Sun Ra-inflected dance pop of "A Love From Outer Space" – a song so ecstatic, Andrew Weatherall later named a club night after it – through the drowsy dub confusion of "What's All This Then", the pop confection of "Miles Apart", the languorous soul of "Sugarwings". They return, on occasion, to the guitar-scapes of their past – the lagoon of drone that is "Down", the featherlight amble of "Honeysuckleswallow" – but the gist is making everything brighter, clearer, more curious.

After *i*, things started to fall apart – there was a remix EP in 1990, and then, four years later, a third album, *New Clear Child*, on David Byrne's Luaka Bop label. More poised and direct, peaceable where its predecessors were unpredictable, it has its own charms, and is perhaps the most underrated of their albums. But an attempted fourth album stalled, and the duo splintered, Tambala working with sister Maggie firstly as Sufi, and now Jübl, while Ayuli, resident in America, released two solo albums as Alex! before retiring from music. But perhaps what we have here is all we really need – two years where AR Kane dreamed for us all a new pop music, an alchemical vision of what dream pop really could be.

HOW TO BUY...

{ LISTEN UP! }

The roots of AR Kane's dream pop

MILES DAVIS
Kind Of Blue
COLUMBIA, 1959
The radical stillness of *Kind Of Blue* still has the capacity to startle, six decades on, even as it's widely recognised as one of Davis's most approachable, sustaining works. You can hear that radicality in the moments of ghostly pause in AR Kane – see the frozen seascape of "Sulliday", or the denuded "Scab". No wonder it's Tambala's favourite Miles album. **10/10**

BASEMENT 5
In Dub ISLAND, 1980
Part of the post-punk milieu – Don Letts was their vocalist for a brief time, they supported PIL, and Raincoats member Richard Dudanski played drums – Basement 5 were one of the great punk-reggae crossovers, particularly when photographer-cum-vocalist Dennis Morris took charge. Abstracting from their Martin Hannett-produced debut, *In Dub* is a cosmic mosaic of echo-delay intensity and spaced-out guitar and voice. **8/10**

COCTEAU TWINS
Tiny Dynamine/Echoes In A Shallow Bay 4AD, 1985
The Cocteaus in their imperial phase, "Tiny Dynamine" and "Echoes" are two EPs, released a week apart, where the trio took their songs and pushed them to new, unexpected places – the ambient flotsam of "Great Spangled Fritillary"; the cascading shivers of guitar through "Pink Orange Red"; and on "Melonella", a surprising list song whose lyrics consist entirely of moth genera. **8/10**

MICHAEL BENNETT

Tambala with AR Kane live on day one of On Blackheath at Blackheath Common, London, Sept 10, 2016

Q&A

Rudy Tambala: "We thought we were gods! We thought we'd been blessed..."

The box covers such a brief window – two years only, and not even everything released over that time. It was such a rich period for AR Kane, things seemed continually to be happening.

I don't know what other musicians' creative processes are. I don't think there are two that are the same. But I know ours was like kids in a candy store, really. Fill your pockets up with everything you can get and eat as much as you can! It was very much like that. Our [*process*] was technology-driven to a large extent, because digital technology came into its own in the mid-'80s, and its price went really low.

The "Up Home!" EP is an extraordinary record...

We wanted people to be completely subsumed into the sound, so they'd dissolve into it. That was the feeling... When we went in to do the "Up Home!" EP we had so much excitement and energy, and we had no boundaries. We probably thought we were gods! [*laughs*] We thought we'd been blessed. We knew it wasn't just our doing, it was happening to us, and we just went with the flow.

It's a fascinating record because of the political stuff that's in there as well.

The "W.O.G.S." thing. When I was a kid, we were called wogs... Wog had an impact like the word cunt. It was blunt, it was harsh. When somebody said it, you had no doubt it was an extremely negative intention... It was political. I don't think you can be of an ethnic minority on the British Isles without having politics on your daily menu.

How was *sixty nine* recorded – what was that experience like?

We said to Rough Trade, "Give us the recording advance," and then Ray Shulman took us into London and said, "If you want to record, I recommend this mixing desk, this tape machine, this sampler, this drum machine, this sequencer – I'll show you how they all work." We just did it, set it up and started recording, completely on our own, in this dark, damp basement in the East End of London. It was very insular, very closed from the world. We had girlfriends at the time, Anita and Tina, and they became studio widows, basically, because that's where we were! They'd come down and poke their heads around the door and we'd look at them with these blank expressions, like, "fuck off, we're working!" [*laughs*] But they were very patient.

How do you end up with a song like "Sulliday"?

There were no rules. It was a tone poem. Don't play any chords on this, just play noisy feedback, because, you've seen Sonic Youth, you know this can be done! And don't necessarily have a rhythm. When we finished the track, we realised there were no drums on it, so we put a drum on afterwards, the heartbeat. If you listen to Sun Ra, you realise there's no end to where you can go. All you'll do is break into another world of music which is far more inclusive, expansive and beautiful, like a Jackson Pollock painting.

> "We had excitement and energy... we knew no boundaries"
> RUDY TAMBALA

The second side of *sixty nine* is where you push through to that, on a song like "The Sun Falls Into The Sea", with that beautiful free jazz clarinet. You would often talk about Miles Davis and Sun Ra in interviews.

We were really into Miles – *Kind Of Blue* is my favourite Miles, it's modal jazz. I really love that record. But I came to that from jazz-funk and disco, because I was a clubber. I remember a friend of mine, who plays on "The Sun Falls Into The Sea", we went to listen to some jazz-funk at his house one day, and he put on some jazz, I was like – "This ain't jazz-funk! But it's kinda good..." And that was it. Suddenly it's like, I want jazz now!

So how do you get from *sixty nine* to *i*?

I started writing lots and lots of tunes, lyrics and music, and Alex started writing. We'd get together, swap and play around with them. Suddenly, we had a large body of music. We had our moment of acclaim around then, so lots of musicians were interested in working with us. There was quite a community in east London of people that I knew. There was this guy, Billy McGee, a classical musician who used to do all the arrangements and play double bass for Marc Almond. He was in our circle; we'd go to his house, skin up and he'd play us Mozart. All these influences were coming in. People were constantly playing us things: "Have you heard this?"

Bonjo I from African Head Charge plays percussion on "A Love From Outer Space"...

We saw him playing live with African Head Charge, and said, can you play percussion on a song of ours, and he said, "Yeah, I can bring some drums along." So he turned up with 18 drums! He set them up, and I asked, "Which ones are you going to play?" And he said, "I'm going to play all of them." [*laughs*] That percussion in there, that's what gives it that rolling rhythm. People who got into the indie-dance crossover around that era, it was quite an influential track for that.

INTERVIEW: JON DALE

LORNE THOMSON/REDFERNS

DAVID ARNOFF/PRESS

THE DREAM SYNDICATE

History Kinda Pales When It And You Are Aligned: The Days Of Wine And Roses 40th Anniversary Edition

FIRE

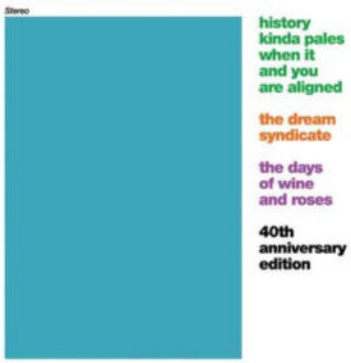
9/10

The whole story of the band's epochal first lineup, remastered and with 31 unreleased tracks. *By Nick Hasted*

"IS it recording yet?" a male voice asks at The Dream Syndicate's first rehearsal. "Yeah," Kendra Smith dryly replies. "Every gem." Doubling the length of *The Days Of Wine And Roses*' 2001 and 2015 reissues, this collection reconstructs the whole fervid world of the band's first, short-lived incarnation, from that rehearsal on December 27, 1981, through early gigs, to the night their debut album was laid down, and onwards to a tape of a forgotten Tucson show where this great, firefly lineup achieve a wild, casual apotheosis.

"The album itself is a small part of this boxset," Steve Wynn notes, "which is more like a time-capsule of what it was like to be in the band and around us in LA at that time, to see that lineup developing through the year we were together. Defiant's a good word for us then, when it was us against a world that wasn't even bothering to pay attention."

The Dream Syndicate's reference points, so rebellious at synth-point's peak, seem less important now, when the Velvets, Stooges and Crazy Horse are classic rock's lingua franca. *The Days Of Wine And Roses* has sounded like a landmark, not a throwback, for a while. Wynn's terse songcraft is at the core of a molten sound, carried forward by Smith's logical, melodic bass and Dennis Duck's solid beat, but liable to be flayed and sliced by Karl Precoda's lead guitar, speaking a private language of decorative and deconstructive feedback only his bandmates comprehend. He's the band's Brian Jones, splashing on crucial colours, and their Thurston Moore, exploring action painting explosions, and drawing Wynn's steadier guitar to him in a thrilling embrace. This quartet had mostly just turned 20 years old, and their precocious achievement is the story told here.



As the album's opener, "Tell Me When It's Over", starts its inevitable, looping drive, the guitars' languid jangle and needling, post-punk edge add to the playful suggestion that we've been here before. Wynn's voice and lyrics are bracingly disaffected, stuck like Dylan in Memphis. It's a clean-lined statement of intent, its classic chassis freshly painted for '82. "That's What You Always Say" is more sinister, a guitar creeping over Smith's relentless riff 'til the band swagger in and Precoda's bucking solo dissolves into persistent, primordial feedback sparks. "Halloween" excavates The Velvet Underground in the context of a subsequent world, with its near-motorik groove, both psychedelic and post-punk. Lou Reed and the Ian McCulloch of "Villiers Terrace" similarly shimmer in Wynn's voice.

That voice is also already his own, with its jittery, embattled cool. Still an English Lit major when the album was recorded, Wynn's paranoid lyrics peak with "Until Lately", which seems to view Reaganite suburbia through the queasy prism of HP Lovecraft or Philip K Dick, as a harmonica darkly howls. Wynn, though, sympathised with his driven, conformist characters. "I had connected strongly to writers like Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill," he reveals, "and the virtue of some perceived sense of hard work and determination. At the time it gave me a much-needed sense of order, and fuelled the lyrics

to 'Tell Me When It's Over' and 'Until Lately'."

This set also includes the sole, woozy single by Wynn's proto-Syndicate project 15 Minutes, that first rehearsal and the "Down There" EP, taped three weeks later and almost equalling the album for shuddering, precise noise. Outtakes are mostly familiar, as is the KPFK radio broadcast's early iteration of "John Coltrane Stereo Blues", "Open Hour", with Precoda's thin, high-wire solo threading through its slow-burn drone and fuzzed thunder. This definitive expression of the band's jazz-like thinking also appears in a still earlier, until-now forgotten live version as "It's Gonna Be Alright", gleaning a rough, abstract groove before the tape cuts out. "I can hear the band's progression on this collection," Wynn considers, "getting more confident, and less afraid to rock. But we didn't want to be a rock band then. We saw ourselves as closer to Ornette Coleman and Sun Ra."

The discoveries which make this release essential are two unreleased live discs drawn from Duck's cassette archive. A Halloween gig at a vintage clothes store on a bill with HG Lewis gore movies finds the band in informal, goofy mood, battling sound problems, but adding unhinged aggression to "Until Lately", where Wynn's hoarsely shredded voice acts like feedbacking guitar. The song "Halloween" is a sturdy, mutable set-piece, played with delicate guitar tracery at one gig, as Smith states the melody with characteristic wryness and optimism, then as a diseased jangle at Reseda, California's Country Club.

This whole period finds final expression on a night at the Backstage, Tucson, in 1982. Precoda has been hassled for his long hair, here far from LA, inspiring a martial cover of Johnny Cash's "Folsom City Blues". The excitement is enhanced by the tape's fade and surge, as the band rip through "Definitely Clean", and this Syndicate swagger with joy, relishing their good fortune. As they plunge and whip through "Some Kinda Itch", you can hear each musician's individual, absorbed intensity create their collective impact. Smith would soon leave, then Precoda. This is their sound's monument.

"I can hear the band's progression on this collection, getting more confident"

SLEEVE NOTES

CD1 Original Days Of Wine And Roses album + Down There EP
1 Tell Me When It's Over
2 Definitely Clean
3 That's What You Always Say
4 Then She Remembers
5 Halloween
6 When You Smile
7 Until Lately
8 Too Little, Too Late
9 The Days Of Wine And Roses
10 Sure Thing *[Down There EP]*
11 That's What You Always Say *[Down There EP]*
12 When You Smile *[Down There EP]*
13 Some Kinda Itch *[Down There EP]*

CD2 Even More Hot Rocks (No Hits & Out Of Phase Cookies)
1 That's What You Always Say *[15 minutes 7-inch version]*
2 Last Chance For You *[15 Minutes 7-inch version]*
3 Too Little, Too Late *[1981 rehearsal]*
4 Definitely Clean *[1981 rehearsal]*
5 Is It Rolling, Bob? *[1982 rehearsal]*
6 A Reason *[1982 rehearsal]*
7 Like Mary *[1982 rehearsal]*
8 Outside The Dream Syndicate *[1982 rehearsal]*
9 Last Chance For You *[1982 rehearsal]*
10 Unknown song with lyrics *[1982 rehearsal]*
11 Some Kinda Itch *[Live at KPFK, 1982]*
12 Open Hour *[Live at KPFK, 1982]*

CD3 Crackling Noises OK – Do Not Correct
Live At 1313 Mockingbird Lane, CA, 1982
1 Until Lately
2 Sure Thing
3 Then She Remembers
4 It's Gonna Be Alright
Live, Unknown Show
5 Halloween
6 That's What You Always Say
7 Sure Thing
8 Definitely Clean
9 Too Little, Too Late
10 When You Smile
11 Some Kinda Itch
12 That's What You Always Say *[Rehearsal]*
13 Road Runner *[Rehearsal]*
14 Instrumental *[Rehearsal]*

CD4 Live'r Than You'll Ever Be
Live At The Country Club, Reseda CA, 1982
1 Tell Me When It's Over
2 That's What You Always Say
3 Sure Thing
4 Then She Remembers
5 Halloween
6 Definitely Clean
7 When You Smile
8 Days Of Wine And Roses
Backstage, Tucson AZ, 1982
9 Halloween
10 Definitely Clean
11 That's What You Always Say
12 Folsom City Blues
13 Until Lately
14 Some Kinda Itch
15 Piece Of My Heart

Q&A

Steve Wynn on the band that you "love or hate"

How much of The Dream Syndicate's MO is there from the start?

It's there from the first rehearsal, it's crazy. The first night Dennis joined us, we were fully formed. When I hear recordings of shows I played last month in the UK, it's not that far removed.

Kendra says in the liner notes that sometimes as the band played in those days, she'd white out, because "it was just too much".

In a lot of ways Kendra was the soul of that band. She brought that mystical, almost hippie, trance-like element. Kendra didn't have any ego or bass chops to demonstrate. She just wanted to be a conduit to this place of abandon. Kendra and Dennis both had the idea that we don't need to do anything but repeat, repeat, while Karl made a bunch of noise. A lot of the music we liked did that – The VU, Stooges, Modern Lovers, and bands in England who were into a jagged, trance-type thing. The Fall, more than anything.

Is it satisfying to see this level of archaeology into your band's past?

It's hard to imagine that 40 years later there will be this parsing through the ashtrays of your life. Luckily it holds up, but it did back then too. We knew how good we were. And we laid down the gauntlet that we're going to be the band that people love or hate. Do you love us? Do you really dig this, or are you just kidding around? *INTERVIEW: NICK HASTED*

Wynn with The Dream Syndicate at SXSW, Austin, Texas, 2022

SAMANTHA BURKARDT/GETTY IMAGES FOR SXSW

AtoZ

This month...

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P48 ARTHUR RUSSELL
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MATT BERRY
Kill The Wolf (reissue, 2013)
ACID JAZZ
7/10
Actor's second album of prog folk-pop gets 10th-anniversary reissue

While perhaps more renowned for his comedic roles in shows such as *Toast Of London*, *What We Do In The Shadows* and *The IT Crowd*, Matt Berry has an equally longstanding and impassioned relationship with songwriting. Aside from creating music for numerous TV shows, he's been releasing a steady stream of solo albums now stretching into double figures. His second LP is a charming and quietly infectious blend of prog, psychedelia, folk and melodic pop. While Berry's unmistakeable voice is at the centre of many tracks, such the catchy and breezy folk-pop of "Medicine" or the string-heavy and propulsive drive of "Devil Inside Me", he also knows when to step back and let the music sing. Perhaps most notably on the epic nine-minute "Solstice", which combines Berry's clear love for Jarre-esque electronica with sprawling and au dacious prog-rock, resulting in an album centrepiece that manages to sound both deeply serious and wildly fun. **Extras: 9/10.** 12 extra tracks of outtakes and demos.
DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

BETTIE SERVEERT
Palomine (reissue, 1992)
MATADOR
8/10
Pass the Dutch to the leftfield side

Signed in America by Matador on the strengths of a demo, and licensed in the UK to Guernica – 4AD's admirable, if short-lived, early '90s boutique label – Bettie Serveert were, albeit briefly, the Netherlands' hippest band of all time. A suitably murky Sebadoh cover, "Healthy Sick", helped establish their lineage, but there was much more to their debut, *Palomine*, with Carol Van Dijk's guitar lines tangling with Peter Visser's ➤

The 'Fucking' Champs: California tripping

while her sassy yet sensitive vocals offered hints of Patti Smith and, particularly on the dynamic "Tom Boy", Chrissie Hynde. At times, as on the affable title track, they jangled like The Velvet Underground, but elsewhere they traded in sprawling, Crazy Horse guitar jams, especially on the filthy "Kid's Allright", the frantic "Balentine", and opener "Leg", whose early, quietly dissonant guitars indicate the predominant, ambiguous mood of upbeat gloom to come. **Extras: 7/10.** All three tracks from original bonus 7", "Brain-Tag", plus early demo "Maggot". ***WYNDHAM WALLACE***

THE CHAMPS
Ill (reissue, 1997) DRAG CITY
8/10

(Mostly) metal opus gets the remastered treatment

Originally released under the name *C4AM95*, *III* was the official full-length debut from the Californian trio – later The Fucking Champs – and a 25-track double. Which might seem audacious, were it not for the fact that guitarist Tim Green played in Nation Of Ulysses and his bandmates were equally practised. It's an (almost entirely) instrumental metal monolith with a doom edge, built on extended passages of riffing and harmonised duelling guitars, with a ferociously clipped rhythmic drive. Iron Maiden and Metallica are obvious touchstones, but there's no virtuosic showboating and the melodic zip makes for a gleeful ride. As do changes of mood and electronic views along the way: "Sad Segovia" suggests Goblin given a clubby makeover, "Heart To Heart" drops strobing synth over a King Crimson-ish solo and "The Golden Pipes Trilogy 2: On Seas Of Sorrow Sail Death's Ships" is a symphony of sighing, deeply dolorous synths. All up, a heav(enl)y trip. ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

THE CINEMATIC ORCHESTRA
Every Day: 20th Anniversary Edition NINJA TUNE
9/10

A nu-jazz masterpiece celebrates its 20th birthday

Adapted from music initially developed for their score for the Soviet silent classic *Man With A Movie Camera* and released in 2002, the Cinematic Orchestra's second album marked a major advance for the Ninja Tune group. Shifting beyond their more sample-based, downtempo-leaning early sound, they arrive at a striking vision of 21st-century jazz that showcases their flair for sumptuous Gil Evans-style orchestrations. Presented here in a 3LP edition, *Every Day* may stay at a low simmer compared to the pyrotechnical displays of Sons Of Kemet and other contemporary standard-bearers for British jazz but there's no lack of drama. Two of the four outtakes included for the reissue, "Oregon" suggests what the album might've been had they taken a more cosmic trajectory, while "Horizon" augments the original set's triumphant appearances by Fontella Bass and Roots Manuva with a similarly nimble contribution by Niara Scarlett. **Extras: 7/10.** Triple-vinyl includes new artwork, photos and liner notes by Gilles Peterson. ***JASON ANDERSON***

COMET GAIN
The Misfit Jukebox TAPETE
9/10

Bandcamp booty, bumped to vinyl and compact disc

Through 2022, David Christian Bower opened the metaphoric dusty boxes that constitute the Comet Gain archives, making highlights available to fans in a steady stream via Bandcamp. Across three volumes of *Misfit Jukebox*, Bower exposed some of the hidden wiring of this most quixotic of indie-pop groups (though, truth be known, they're much closer to a rough-housing soul-punk gang à la early Subway Sect). He's since edited that trio of online releases down to a 17-song, 53-minute full-length that's revelatory for both its aesthetic scope, and the tenacity and purity of Bower's vision. He's still in love with his heroes – opener "The Weekend Dreams" is the greatest song Dan Treacy never got around to writing, circa ... *And Don't The Kids Just Love It* – but there are nimble takes on Northern Soul here, too, and some lovely, intimate lo-fi documents, like the gorgeous "My Time Tunnel". ***JON DALE***

DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS
The Complete Dirty South NEW WEST
9/10

The definitive version of 2004's Southern Gothic classic

The third in the Truckers' outstanding trilogy of Southern-themed albums, *The Dirty South* was originally something of a compromise. The Truckers were asked to trim the record to fit a single CD, which meant three tracks were cut (these appeared on the band's 2009 rarities album). This trio has now been restored while two others have been given significantly different vocals – all packaged with photos, art and commentary from Patterson Hood, Mike Cooley and Jason Isbell. It's this mix of songwriting voices as well as the tight thematic concept of *The Dirty South* that makes this such a strong LP, and the new songs don't diminish that. Isbell's "TVA" celebrates the Tennessee Valley Authority bringing work and electricity to the south during the Depression, while Hood's "Goode's Field Road" and "The Great Car Dealer War" cover nefarious doings and smalltown insurance scams, entirely in keeping with the band's rich, dark expression of the American South. **Extras: 7/10.** 32-page book with liner notes and artwork. ***PETER WATTS***

HEAVENLY
Le Jardin De Heavenly (reissue, 1992) SKEP WAX
7/10

Expanded vinyl reissue for Oxford indie combo's second album

Three decades on, it still astonishes just how divisive Amelia Fletcher's mild-mannered post-*C86* guitar-janglers proved to be in their modest heyday. First released in 1992, Heavenly's second LP was savaged in the weekly music papers as sexless, twee, infantilised drivel, but it has since gained in critical stature. In fairness, with hindsight, some of these wistful heart-twangers border on flimsy whimsy; but bruised lullabies like "And The Birds Aren't Singing" or "Different Day" are elevated by new keyboard player Cathy Rogers, whose flutey harmonies lend Fletcher's vocals a bittersweet vintage girl-group feel. Also historically interesting is "C Is The Heavenly Option", an off-key duet featuring the band's US label boss Calvin Johnson, cementing the Oxford combo's transatlantic links to the seminal K Records scene that nourished grunge and riot grrrl. Not flawless, but a charmingly nostalgic time capsule. **Extras: 7/10.** Two additional tracks from non-album single. ***STEPHEN DALTON***

HAROLD LAND
Damisi (reissue, 1972) WEWANTSOUNDS
8/10

Jazz-funk set from underrated West Coast saxophonist

Tenor saxophonist Harold Land cut his teeth on hard bop with the Max Roach/Clifford Brown band in the '50s, then became a key player in the West Coast scene, exploring post-bop and jazz-funk and collaborating with vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson, among others. On *Damisi*, originally released in 1972 by Mainstream and now reissued for the first time on vinyl, Land's influences converge toward a funkier, more spiritual sound. The music is loose in a controlled way, approaching fusion but managing to avoid smooth jazz schmaltz. Oscar Brashear's trumpet is fiery and curious, while pianist Bill Henderson lends a nearly proggy groove when he busts out the Fender Rhodes. Land adds an oboe to his repertoire on the lovely "Pakistan", imbuing the song with serene, reflective mystery. Drummer Ndugu (Leon Chancler) contributes the only non-Land song, "Chocolate Mess", showcasing his funk chops beside burning horn solos and Buster Williams' robust bassline. **Extras: 7/10.** The reissue includes never-before-seen session photos, newly remastered audio, and a two-page insert with new liner notes by Kevin Le Gendre. ***ANA GAVRILOVSKA***

McNEAL & NILES
Thrust (reissue, 1979) WE ARE BUSY BODIES
7/10

Languid, jazz-funk gem resurfaces

Despite its cheesy cover, this seven-track (mostly) instrumental set delivers on the good grooves. Originally an obscurity, now highly collectible, it's the debut from Cleveland-based guitarist Wilbur Niles with keyboard/synth player Machelle McNeal (and band), that traverses funk, jazz and soul/R&B in a mid-fi yet stylish manner. Produced by Niles, whose compositions favour the laidback burn and often stretch well past the five-minute mark, it was partly recorded in a makeshift studio in Akron and opens with "Ja Ja", which rests on a deliciously light and silvery Rhodes hook that repeats throughout. Very different are "Punk Funk", with its popping bass and Herbie-flavoured keys, and the prog-jazz bustle of "Hypertension". "Untitled" is an elegant gear change before "Quiet Isle", whose whacked-out, Santana-ish shimmer makes it a standout, alongside "JaJa". Niles followed up with 1980's *Thrust Too*, featuring McNeal on just one track, on vocals, but it's outshone by this effortless charmer. ***SHARON O'CONNELL***

PAM NASHEL

T.REX

1973: Whatever Happened To The Teenage Dream?

DEMON

8/10

The half-realised glories of Marc Bolan's space-age funk period. *By Alastair McKay*

STEVE PRIEST of The Sweet once suggested that glam rock began with Marc Bolan wearing a pink feather boa. From this moment of camp inspiration a gloriously absurd movement was born, and *Top Of The Pops* was transformed into a crowd-scene of hod-carriers in Bacofoil trousers.

For Bolan, the association was a mixed blessing. If glam rock was – to quote David Bowie quoting John Lennon – "rock'n'roll with lipstick on", Bolan's position at the centre of the mania came via a convoluted route. He had been a mod, abandoning the look by 1965, and adding a sprinkling of psychedelia in John's Children. Tyrannosaurus Rex were mystical hippie minstrels, before abbreviating their name and condensing their appeal. A string of huge hits for T.Rex began with "Ride A White Swan" in 1970, and the whirlwind of commercial inevitability which publicist BP Fallon called T.Rextasy continued through 1971, reaching a peak of sorts when T.Rex played two shows in one day at the Empire Pool, Wembley, in March 1972. The film of their two shows, *Born To Boogie*, was directed by Ringo Starr and was hailed as a passing of the torch, from The Beatles to T.Rex. On its release, Bolan dubbed himself "Cecil B deBolan" and talked airily about filming a sequel.

And yet. And yet. Being at the eye of a phenomenon is not a long-term plan, and Bolan's private life was beginning to show the strain. In the sleevenotes of this 5LP/4CD box, biographer Mark Paytress notes that in 1972, Bolan talked of becoming a recluse, developed a dread of plane crashes and entertained the probability that he would die young. In October 1972, he had suffered a breakdown which was characterised as a "partial heart attack". Cognac and cocaine binges delivered "crushing downsides".

In the midst of these insecurities, Bolan wrote a musical memo to himself on a scrap of paper: "space age funk". It's an idea that would find its place and time. Bolan's contemporary and rival, David Bowie, would get there soon enough. Decades later Prince would crush Bolan's elfin androgyny into dynamic new shapes. For Bolan, the concept would remain half-realised, an evolution too far. It would also have been a mistake, a category error which ignored Bolan's more obvious gifts. Happily, in failing to deliver on his promise to himself, Bolan produced some of his most enduring music.

We should start with the singles. In 1973, popular acts made hit 45s, and credible artists made albums. There are two albums on this box, *Tanx* and *Zinc Alloy And The Hidden Riders Of Tomorrow*. One of these is very good, and was released with a fold-out poster of Bolan sitting astride a phallic toy tank. The other sounds like an attempt to follow David Bowie down a theatrical side-street.

The singles, though, require no explanation. They are signed, sealed and delivered with such boastful aplomb that they mock any attempt to unpick their appeal. They are pop songs about pop, sugar-coated and boastful. "Solid Gold Easy Action" is glitter beat without Gary, spliced into a chorus which appends "easy action" as the solution to The Rolling Stones' complaint about their dissatisfaction. (The song also contains the seed of Adam Ant's entire career.) Likewise, "20th Century Boy" is two or three explosions combined. There's a thunderous riff, a yelp, an exaltation. *"Babe, I wanna be your man"*, Bolan sings, quoting pop music as surely as he inhabits it. And then there's "The Groover", with its fabulously arrogant opening chant – T!R!E!X! – before the song swells into a warped gospel hallelujah. The influence of producer Tony Visconti, who also guided Bowie's sound, is obvious, but the inclusion of Bolan's demos shows how resilient the songs are. "Jitterbug Love (Demo)" is a cosmic treat. "Electric Slim & The Factory Hen (aka You Got The Look) (Demo)" has wiry charm. The solo rendition of "The Groover" reveals the bluesy architecture of the tune.

Marc Bolan in 1973: adrift from his younger self

And space-age funk? Well, there's a bit of Sly Stone in "20th Century Boy". It's a small mercy that the world ignored Bolan's suggestion that the song marked the birth of a new genre, Erection Rock. His more soulful leanings are explored in the recordings he made with singer Sister Pat Hall, which have Bolan's gospel kinks pushed to the forefront. They're not without merit – "Ghetto Baby" contains the kernel of George Michael's entire career. But they're not T.Rex. Bolan's interest in gospel and soul was influenced by his relationship with Gloria Jones, but there's a mismatch between Bolan's pop sensibility and the excitations of gospel. "Sky Church Music (alt version)" is a demonstration of what happens when a singer finds himself in the awkward position of being both lost and found.

So, what happened to Marc Bolan in 1973? The final track arrives as a solemn postscript: a recording of "Teenage Dream" as performed on *Top Of The Pops* on February 7, 1974. Sonically, it could be better. The tune phases in and out like a rented TV with a coat-hanger aerial. Musically, the dream is fitful, weary and jaded, with Marc Bolan sounding suddenly adrift from the easy brilliance of his younger self.

SLEEVE NOTES

CD 1: Tanx
Tracks 1-13
+bonus 45 Cuts
14 Children Of The Revolution
15 Jitterbug Love
16 Sunken Rags
17 Solid Gold Easy Action
18 Xmas Riff
19 20th Century Boy
20 Free Angel

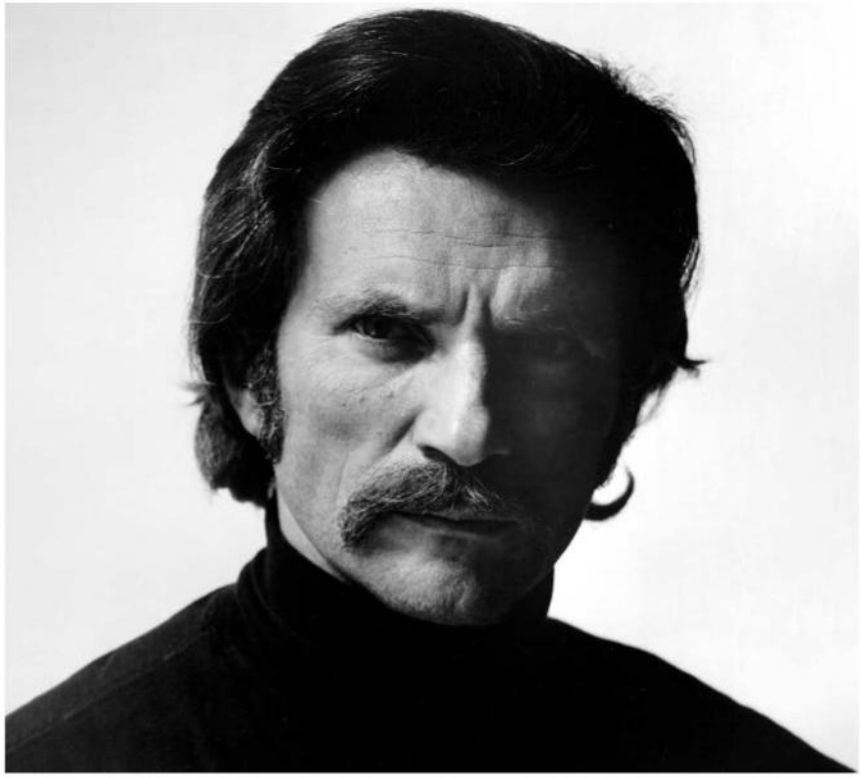
CD 2: Zinc Alloy And The Hidden Riders Of Tomorrow/A Creamed Cage In August
Tracks 1-14
+bonus 45 cuts
15 The Groover
16 Midnight
17 Truck On (Tyke)
18 Sitting Here
19 Satisfaction Pony

Cd 3: Private Numbers
TANX ERA
1 Jitterbug Love
2 Electric Slim And The Factory Hen [alias You Got The Look]
3 Highway Knees
4 Mad Donna
5 Mister Mister
6 Country Honey
7 Rapids
8 Life Is Strange
9 The Street And Babe Shadow
10 Darling
11 Free Angel
12 Left Hand Luke And The Beggar Boys
ZINC ALLOY ERA
13 Change
14 Galaxy
15 Carsmile Smith & The Old One
16 Spanish Midnight
17 Sitting There [Sitting Here]
18 Gardenia & The Mighty Slug
19 The Groover
20 Dance In The Midnight
21 Saturation Syncopation
22 Delanie
23 Saturday Night
24 Till Dawn
25 Stand By Me

Cd 4: Look To Your Soul
T.REX
1 Hope You Enjoy The Show
BIG CARROT
2 Black Jack
3 Squint Eye Mangle
T.REX - ZINC ALLOY OUTTAKES
4 The Avengers (Superbad)
5 Look To Your Soul
6 Down Home Lady
7 All My Love
SISTER PAT HALL
8 When I Was A Child
9 Ghetto Baby
10 Sailors Of The Highway
11 Jitterbug Love
12 High
13 City Port
14 Sunken Rags
Do Your Thing
Tell Me
T.REX
15 Sky Church Music
16 Teenage Dream [*Top Of The Pops version*]

REDISCOVERED

Uncovering the underrated and overlooked



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

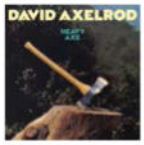
DAVID AXELROD

Heavy Axe (reissue, 1974)

JAZZ DISPENSARY

7/10

Influential producer's neglected sixth returns to vinyl



A STREET-fighting man who cheerfully scaled cocaine mountains with Sly Stone, and once sought by George Harrison for Apple Records, David Axelrod had barely worked for a decade when, in the mid-'90s, his name began circulating among crate-digging fans. Indeed, just a few years earlier, the former Capitol Records A&R and staff producer – who'd started his career in the late '50s producing jazz records for the likes of Harold Land and Charles Mingus associate Buddy Collette – had been verging on homelessness.

In 1993, however, De La Soul's *Buhloone Mindstate* twice featured a prominent piano from his Lou Rawls production "You've Made Me So Very Happy", while three years later DJ Shadow's "Midnight In A Perfect World" lifted from Axelrod's "The Human Abstract". Shadow even lured him out of retirement to remix UNKLE and Thom Yorke's "Rabbit In Your Headlights" in 1998, before Mo' Wax released an eponymous album of revised, unreleased tracks in 2001. That same year, Dr Dre's ubiquitous blockbuster "The Next Episode" hijacked the distinctive, dramatic opening of 1967's "The Edge", produced by Axelrod for actor David McCallum. When he died in 2017, Questlove declared, "He WAS hip-hop."

Axelrod's appeal is best encapsulated by his first two solo albums, 1968's *Song Of Innocence* and 1969's *Songs Of Experience*. That these suites were inspired by William Blake's poetry speaks to their grand ambitions: his flamboyant, dynamic arrangements, all brass, strings and perfectly mic'd drums, with cavernous rhythms ideally suited to the breakbeat generation, were furnished with a luxury suggesting an unassailable urge to dwarf Phil Spector's Wall Of Sound. Such elements remain central to 1974's *Heavy Axe*, but it's telling that it's provided less fertile ground for sample junkies, and that's arguably not only because its likeminded production is credited to his friend Cannonball Adderley, himself a frequent beneficiary of Axelrod's techniques.

Axelrod instead arranges and conducts here, as well as writing the four best tracks. The highlight is "Mucho Chupar", whose percussive, soulful funk, enhanced by Minnie Riperton-style squeals and Donna Summer moans, hurtles towards a colossal climax, while "Everything Counts" lithely reinterprets *Song Of Innocence*'s revered "Holy Thursday". Elsewhere, however, his selection of material is less gripping. Adderley's own "Get Up Off Your Hands" offers an entertainingly overblown Las Vegas opener, but Stevie Wonder's "Don't You Worry 'Bout A Thing" is reduced to incidental music for a *Quincy* episode, and Stephanie Spruill seems hellbent on caricaturing Millie Jackson's worst excesses on a cabaret "You're So Vain". Faithful fans will celebrate this return to vinyl then, but even they will concede that 'The Ax' was capable of far heavier, more cutting-edge work.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

OLIVER NELSON

Black, Brown And Beautiful

ACE/FLYING DUTCHMAN

9/10

An MLK tribute that traverses jazz and avant-garde modernism

Nelson, who died of a heart attack in 1975, aged only 43, was a hugely inventive orchestrator as well as being a great jazz saxophonist, and this long-out-of-print 1969 eulogy to Martin Luther King Jr combines both of these skills – half orchestral modernism, half big-swinging hard bop. Side One features the Stravinsky-meets-Elmer Bernstein-style atonality of "Aftermath", the horror-movie cacophony of "Lamb Of God", the Aaron Copland-style cowboy swagger of "Martin Was A Man", and Nelson's Steve Reich-ish minimalist piano playing on "Requiem". Having established the panegyric mood, Nelson moves into jazzier, more defiant territory on Side Two. He plays soprano sax on the slow, hard-grooving "I Hope In Time A Change Will Come", switches to alto on the string-drenched, Ray Charles-inspired title track and the deliciously hymnal free bop of the closer "Requiem, Afterthoughts". Truly staggering, however, are Nelson's big band arrangements, a fusion of funky swing and avant-garde dissonance that seems genuinely unique in music history. ***JOHN LEWIS***

NEW YORK DOLLS

Dawn Of The Dolls CLEOPATRA

8/10

Nine tracks leaning deep into punk's future; AOR rockers, beware

When the Dolls dawned in the early 1970s, songwriter David Johansen, with help especially from incredible guitarist Johnny Thunders, presented rock'n'roll in a radical new light. These nine demos, six of which would land on their 1973 debut album, find the Dolls fully aware of the world to come. Amid the powerful, pounding instrumentation, Johansen virtually howls from verse to verse, while Thunders, guitarist Syl Sylvain, bassist Arthur Kane and drummer Billy Murcia answer back in kind. Highlights include "Don't Start Me Talking", a blues-punk masterpiece full of multiple guitar leads, and "Personality Crisis", with greetings to the Ramones and the Sex Pistols.

Extras: 7/10. Rare photos, extensive liner notes, and production by famed punk/new wave producer Marty Thau. ***LUKE TORN***

MIKE OLDFIELD

Tubular Bells: 50th Anniversary Edition UMC

8/10

In Dulci Jubilo! Virgin Records' opening gambit hits its golden anniversary

Familiarity breeds contempt, so many who endured its heyday tend to dismiss how extraordinary *Tubular Bells* seemed in 1973, when its "orgy of over-dubbing" (© *NME*) remained unfamiliar. Embraced by John Peel, acclaimed for its innovation, its peaks remain impressive, especially the haunting opening melody, effectively exploited by William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* and, later, the 2012 London Olympics in its sometimes ungainly, albeit crowd-pleasing medley, "Tubular

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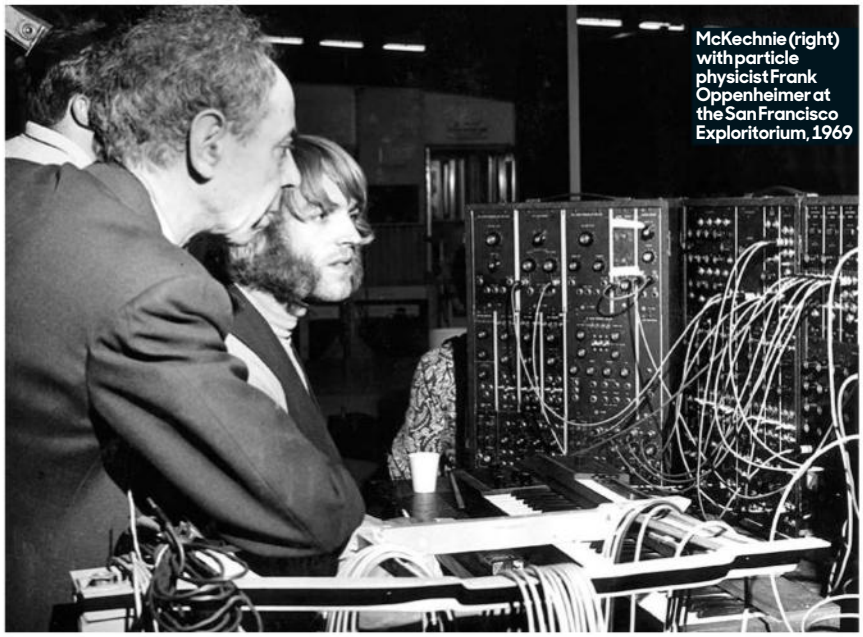

McKechnie (right) with particle physicist Frank Oppenheimer at the San Francisco Exploritorium, 1969

DOUG McKECHNIE

The Complete San Francisco Moog 1968–72

VG+

8/10

Unearthed music by an unlikely modular synth pioneer

IN the telling, it sounds a bit like make-believe: the West Coast hippie who borrowed one of the very first Moog Modular Series III synthesisers back in 1968, developed his own live improvisatory style, opened up the ill-fated Altamont Free Festival at sunrise with 20 minutes of deep progressive synth, and inspired some of the giants of German kosmische music before vanishing from the scene.

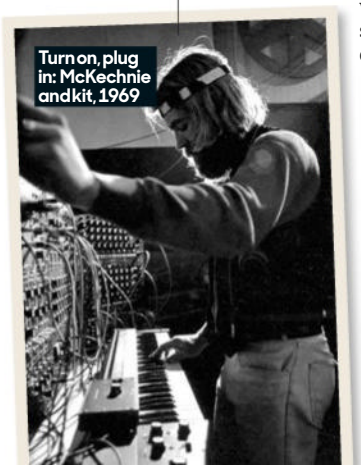
Even if half of what's been ascribed to Doug McKechnie is true, it constitutes a significant upset in the recognised timeline of electronic music. But if he's slipped through the gaps of music history, it's for a prosaic enough reason. McKechnie primarily thought of himself as a live performer, and for four or so years he hauled the hulking modular system around theatres, museums, planetariums and other assorted "happenings" across San Francisco without ever preparing any music for official release. The 11 tracks collected on this compilation were all but unheard until, at the encouragement of electronic producer PJ Dorsey, aka Tarotplane, McKechnie dug a number of reel-to-reel tapes out of the back of his closet a few years ago.

Listening to this music today, it's hard to deny that McKechnie was ahead of his time. "The First Exploration", recorded at his shared studio space, San Francisco Radical Laboratories, in 1968, sets a blueprint of sorts for the next half-century of modular exploration: synth notes falling in cascades, a tweak of a dial turning the textures from dull to bright, the whole thing engendering a state of lysergic bliss. Elsewhere, *The Complete San Francisco Moog*... explores a number of different modes: eerie nocturnal improvisations ("Berkeley Art Museum"), pulsating proto-techno ("Crazy Ray") and monged-out drones ("Meditation Moog 1968"). McKechnie used a keyboard alongside his two 24-step sequencers, which means his music retains a melodic quality, even as in places it voyages to the brink of abstraction.

If things had panned out slightly differently, you can imagine McKechnie becoming the USA's first modular synth celebrity. His music caught the attention of fellow heads like the Grateful Dead, who invited him to supply synthwork to their 1969 album *Aoxomoxoa*, and word of his performances filtered across the Atlantic to Germany via Gerhard Augustin, a United Artists A&R who went on to sign Can and Popol Vuh.

But in 1972, McKechnie's partner at Radical Laboratories, Bruce Hatch, decided to sell the Moog modular to Christopher Franke of Tangerine Dream. One year later Tangerine Dream released their breakout album *Phaedra*, whose dense sequenced synth passages sound not dissimilar to the music collected on *The Complete San Francisco Moog 1968–72*. A coincidence? Maybe, maybe not. Regardless, McKechnie's music stands as something more than a time capsule, a glimpse of an age when pioneering technology and a spirit of curiosity intersected to bring a new sound into being.

LOUIS PATTISON


Turn on, plug in: McKechnie and kit, 1969

Bells/In Dulci Jubilo", included here. The now-retired Oldfield's likely final recording, an abandoned 2017 *Tubular Bells 4* intro, puts a gentle spin on its finest moment, and an endless Oldfield and YORK remix accrues contemporary dancefloor tropes, but lengthy prog-jazz passages, the anti-climactic "Sailor's Hornpipe", and bonus track "Mike Oldfield's Single" – poor man – haven't improved with age.

Extras: 8/10. Formats offer varied bonuses: vinyl gets half-speed Abbey Road mastering and Blu-ray adds David Kosten's Dolby Atmos mix and Oldfield's 5.1 Surround mix.

WYNDHAM WALLACE

ARTHUR RUSSELL

A Picture Of Bunny Rabbit ROUGH TRADE

9/10

More mid-'80s marvels from fine composer

Someday, there may be no more wonders to emerge from the trove of unreleased recordings Arthur Russell left behind when he died in 1992, but thankfully we're not there yet. Named for a musical tribute to a friend's pet that may be the most experimental and least cuddly piece here, *A Picture Of Bunny Rabbit* consists of nine songs created in the same period that yielded 1986's *World Of Echo*, his most celebrated solo recording to appear in his lifetime. While the opener "Fuzzbuster #10" and the title track demonstrate the profound influences of La Monte Young and raga music on Russell's alternately ethereal and febrile music for voice and cello, the more menacing "Fuzzbuster #09" could almost be an interlude on Sonic Youth's *Confusion Is Sex*. A few other discoveries are equally astonishing, like the stark solo version of "In The Light Of A Miracle" and "The Boy With A Smile", a rapturous piece that features one of the most intimate and beautiful vocal performances Russell ever recorded.

JASON ANDERSON

STURGILL SIMPSON

High Top Mountain: 10th Anniversary Edition HIGH TOP MOUNTAIN

8/10

Opening volley from ornery anti-outlaw

On the very first song on his very first solo album, Sturgill Simpson makes it clear that he's no outlaw. He might sound a bit like ol' Waylon, but *"the most outlaw thing that I've ever done was give a good woman a ring"*. Ten years on, "Life Ain't Fair And The World Is Mean" sounds like an especially apt introduction to an artist who followed his muse into blistering guitar rock, bluegrass and trippy metamodernism. *High Top Mountain* foretells every hard left turn, as Simpson comes out swinging at label execs and other Nashville strawmen. His orneriness might sound alienating if he didn't write and sing with such humour and heart, laughing about bad rhymes and eulogising his coal-mining heroes. While he rebelled against the Waylon comparisons, Simpson embraces John Prine as an inspiration, especially on "Old King Coal", a lament for his disappearing Kentucky paradise.

Extras: 7/10. Coloured vinyl, altered album cover. ***STEPHEN DEUSNER***

Peel faves Stackridge

STACKRIDGE
Stackridge (reissue, 1971)
CHERRY RED

8/10

Transgressive debut expanded

Even in the 'anything goes' days of the early '70s, there was nobody quite like anarchic Peel favourites Stackridge. Their chaotic debut channelled The Incredible String Band ("Slark"), The Beatles ("Marigold Conjunction"), the Bonzos ("Marzo Plod" about a character who *"used to thrash his rhubarb frantically while his left arm was tied to his uncle's knee"*) and Mungo Jerry ("Dora The Female Explorer"), while "Essence Of Porphyry" was a deranged attempt to marry Zappa to Stravinsky. Were they prog-rockers, fey folkers, pseudo-classicists, jazz instrumentalists or a jug band? In truth, they were all and none of them, the ultimate outliers in an age of outliers, albeit ones who ended up supporting Elton John and The Beach Boys at Wembley Stadium.
Extras: 6/10. Four bonus tracks, including a 15-minute take on "Slark" from the band's first session for Peel's *Top Gear*. ***NIGEL WILLIAMSON***

DAVID SYLVIAN & STEPHAN MATHIEU
Wandermüde (reissue, 2012)
GRÖNLAND

8/10

Ambient heavyweights' grand designs

Even though *Wandermüde* means "tired of wandering" and David Sylvian seldom expresses much enthusiasm for his releases, a dark energy courses through this record which gives the whole thing a wild-eyed, feral glint. This is largely due to German sound designer Stephan Mathieu, whose drone-heavy, layered approach to reworking Sylvian's 2003 album *Blemish* resulted in *Wandermüde*, adding depth and menace to what was already an evocative collection. This reissue presents the work for the first time on vinyl and adds an extra track, "I Can't Pretend To Care", a gentle surge of metallic tones that rounds off the set. Lingering shards of Sylvian associate Christian Fennesz's guitar grumble across "Deceleration" like rain clouds threatening to burst. "Dark Pastoral" deploys corroded *Blade Runner* synths to conjure a sombre mood that continues into "Telegraphed Mistakes". Bleak but beautiful.
Extras: 7/10. New double LP has one extra track. ***PIERS MARTIN***

THE TEARDROP EXPLODES
Culture Bunker 1978–82
UMC

9/10

7LP deep dive into Cope and co

"You're joking, man," went Julian Cope when he was approached about this boxset. "We only did, like, two albums! *Kilimanjaro*'s good and the second one's a bit patchy..." Yet the Teardrops' assorted debris proves to be a fascinating listen. The singles, especially the manic Zoo takes on "Sleeping Gas" and "Bouncing Babies", and demos are strong: the early *Wilder* versions are better – and indeed wilder – than the eventual record, while Cope and Dave Balfe's efforts for the scrapped third album are synth-y instrumental delights. Best of all is the copious live material: "Camera Camera", their debut TV performance in 1979, is raucous and angular, while the 1981 Club Zoo material is evidence that they were gloriously unhinged all the way through.
Extras: 7/10. 12,000-word sleevenotes by compiler Mick Houghton, including new Cope interviews. ***TOM PINNOCK***

GIOVANNI TOMMASO
Indefinitive Atmosphere (reissue, 1970) SONOR MUSIC EDITIONS

8/10

Italian jazz-rock cracker remastered – sax legend Steve Lacy guests

One of those if-you-know-you-know albums: superior jazz fusion, only ever released in Italy, and a grail-like item for collectors. Tommaso is Italy's most celebrated jazz bassist, and founder of popular proggers Perigeo. This pioneering solo debut, recorded in 1968 at RCA Rome, is now happily restored, using original session master tapes unearthed in Tommaso's personal archive. Groovy, airy and accessible – with just the right amount of skronk – it's a European response to Miles' later '60s work, and a second cousin to Ian Carr/Nucleus. There's an anthological, library music feel too: here are 12 tightly focused cuts, typically around two minutes each, with tell-all titles like "Strong Beat" (funky), "Clap Dance" (percussive) and the ambient "Indefinite Atmosphere" (the album title itself is misspelled, *Odessey And Oracle* style). And do check out "Steve", where US soprano saxophonist Steve Lacy blows hard, in a good way. Limited to just 800 vinyl copies worldwide. ***MARK BENTLEY***

TOM WAITS
Closing Time (reissue, 1973)
ASYLUM

8/10

Half-speed vinyl remaster for a conventional singer-songwriter debut that briefly touches greatness

Tom Waits moved to LA in 1972, living in a Silver Lake bedsit, soaking up barroom talk, Bukowski and Lord Buckley, and building a prototype persona. Taped that year, *Closing Time* is tentative, his early uniqueness only glimpsed between country-rock laments and piano-man plaintiveness. "Little Trip To Heaven (On The Wings Of Your Love)" includes playful Satchmo phrasing and scat. Piano and vocal roll in ebbtide waves on "Lonely", the singer castaway. "Grapefruit Moon" lives in a self-reflective world, where *"melody"* breaks his heart. "Martha" announces him. Like early Randy Newman, it offers austere sentimentality to an older character, whose true situation unfolds over a long-distance call to a long-ago lover. *"We were all so young and foolish/Now we are mature"*, he sings, the last word a deathly fate, 'til the emotional trapdoor yawns and tears spring. Suddenly, we're in Waits' world. ***NICK HASTED***

THE WHITE STRIPES
Elephant (Deluxe) XL

8/10

Detroit rockers' mammoth album gets remastered edition 20 years on

Within a year or so, The White Stripes rocketed from cult Detroit duo to million-sellers, attaining worldwide fame and even becoming tabloid fodder. *Elephant* was the album responsible for such a sharp trajectory and, 20 years on, the endless charging thump and booming riff of opener "Seven Nation Army" can still be heard reverberating around bar speakers and football terraces alike. The analogue, London-recorded album harnesses the raw, primal essence of blues-rock, as heard via the gnarly yelps that punctuate their excellent cover of "I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself" or the squealing guitar lines that explode from "There's No Home For You Here". The album's theme of the death of the sweetheart can veer into the overly earnest – such as on the mawkish "I Want To Be The Boy To Warm Your Mother's Heart" – however, flawed moments aside, *Elephant* remains a raucous and exhilarating listen two decades on.
Extras: 9/10. The accompanying 2003 recordings from a Chicago concert is a potent reminder of what a force the pair could be live – as heard on "Ball And Biscuit", in which Jack's almost violently screeching guitar squawks above Meg's ever modest yet always vital backbeat.
DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

COMING NEXT MONTH...

PJ Harvey returns with her first album in seven years, the eerie, excellent *I Inside The Old Year Dying*, while **Dexys** end an even longer break between original records with *The Feminine Divine*. Elsewhere, we'll be taking a look at new LPs from **The Clientele**, **This Is The Kit**, **Cory Hanson**, **Molly Tuttle & Golden Highway** and **M Ward**, and at archival releases from **Bob Dylan**, **Pet Shop Boys**, **Frank Zappa** and **Steely Dan**.
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"WE'RE ALL ON MUSHIES FROM NOW ON!"

Achtung, drudes: Cope models his summer wardrobe in Edinburgh, August 2014

Salvē, JULIAN COPE! Taking time out from creating a replica of Pompeii in his back garden, the archdrude excavates the barrows and cairns of his own ancient history in The Teardrop Explodes. Stand by for apocalyptically weird stories from the heart of post-punk – involving acid trips, knitting and an unexpected cameo from Def Leppard's Joe Elliott. "I was always a c*nt for Amon Düül I," Cope explains to Tom Pinnock

LIKE many men in their sixties, Julian Cope is looking forward to getting out in the garden at the weekend. He's got two sheds to erect and – naturally – an underground city to excavate.

"I'm digging a copy of one of the streets in Pompeii," says Cope, with typical enthusiasm. "Let's see, it'll be about 12-feet wide, with little kiosks, 'cause in Pompeii they had, like, noodle parlours on either side. Where we live is the perfect place for civil engineering works like Avebury, because you've just got unbelievably strong upper chalk..."

Cope and his wife Dorian have been in their rural Wiltshire home for almost 30 years now. It remains the perfect base for them: it's remote enough that they won't disturb anyone or be bothered, and there's even an impressive psychedelic bounty in the grounds.

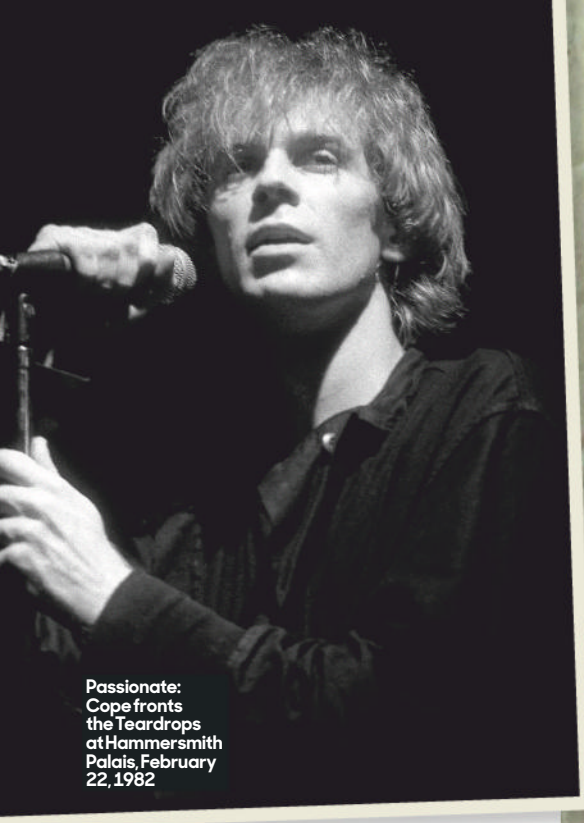
"This is such a mushroom area that it's very easy to dose yourself just in our garden," Cope explains. "For *The Modern Antiquarian*, I went to the valley that was the ur-source of the Avebury stones. I found 27 different types of mushroom, including four different psychedelic ones, in one hour! I think Robert Graves makes a bit of a jump in *The White Goddess* when he says that Mycenae came out of a mushroom cult, but if mushrooms did lead to that level of culture, then it would be like, 'Well, we're all on mushies from now on!'

"Mycenae," he continues, "has got a back entrance that's almost like an asshole! It's like they were bringing in something that nobody really wanted to talk about... It's like the dealer's entrance, like Agamemnon and Clytemnestra had a guy turning up with some coke!"

Excavating his replica Pompeii aside, Cope has a lot on at the moment. There are preparations for this year's 25th anniversary of *The Modern Antiquarian*, his impressive guide to Britain's megalithic heritage. He's "always" working on new music and on his *Cope's Notes* essay series that accompanies his older records: "I'm doing [*2008's*] *Black Sheep* at the moment, so I've been listening to stuff that inspired that – like David Peel, rowdy, street music, and I was always a cunt for Amon Düül I."

He's also rather behind on a new book, tentatively titled 'Lives Of The Prophets: A New Perspective'. "Obviously, prophets are so problematic, even the peace-loving ones," he explains, cheerfully confirming that he's writing before 6am each morning. "It has to be an absolutely ➤

GL PORTRAIT/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Passionate: Cope fronts the Teardrops at Hammersmith Palais, February 22, 1982

"When we were on acid, we were *fun*": The Teardrop Explodes – (l–r) Alan Gill, Dave Balfe, Gary Dwyer and Julian Cope

thorough look. I'm about four years behind now. I think I forgot to take on the demeanour of a Thomas Carlyle, or somebody like that, who's ultimately just gonna go, 'Fuck it. I'm Zarathustra and they can all fuck off!'"

Cope has agreed to a rare interview with *Uncut* to mark the release of *Culture Bunker 1978–82*, a boxset of The Teardrop Explodes' singles, demos and live rarities. While he gave his blessing to the project, he declined to get involved in the box himself and hasn't heard or seen it yet: "I want to be surprised and enjoy it."

Instead he's proposed that we discuss the fertile Liverpool punk and New Wave scene that gave birth to the Teardrops. A world full of imposing characters such as Pete Burns, Jayne Casey and Ian McCulloch, not to mention visitors like Ian Curtis and Mark E Smith. In the city's docks and estates, Cope arrived as an anti-drugs, soul-boy bassist but left as a visionary psychedelic frontman and songwriter.

"I happened to have been gifted, not even a talent, but opportunism. Because I was going to Liverpool in any case, just to a shit college, because my parents wanted to get rid of me. But it just happened that it was the two sevens clash [*1977, as per Marcus Garvey's prophecy of chaos*], and cultural events meant I could put my foot in the door should I wish. Recently, Dorian and I met up with a guy I was at college with. Dorian said, 'Did you know Julian was talented when he was at college?' And he said, 'Talented? I knew he was loud!' That's the fucking *thing*, man. It's just providence, isn't it?"

What got you into punk? I got into it because Johnny Rotten wore an 'I Hate Pink Floyd' T-shirt. I didn't like Pink Floyd and that was enough to set me apart. I was friendly with other people and we didn't have much in common other than we all thought Pink Floyd were shit. To a certain extent, I think that's how punk happened. When I went to Liverpool, I thought all those guys and women I saw were so impressive, because they were so much themselves. I didn't really like what they were into, like Bowie and the New York Dolls, I just liked *them*.

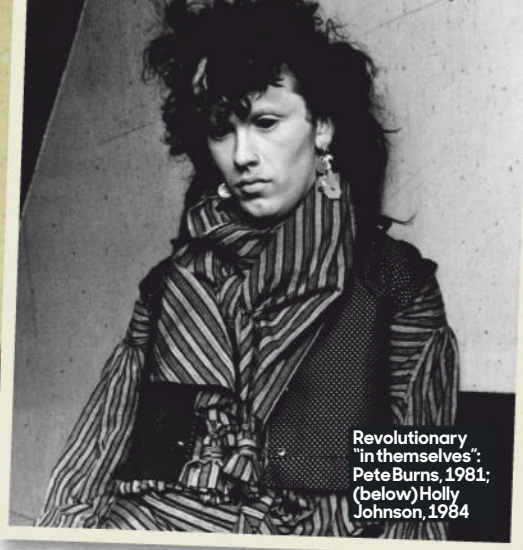
You never really bought into punk as a 'year zero'? I have to say I liked the idea. But I knew enough about revolutions, because my mother was a history teacher, that I just didn't believe I could cut it like that. It took me a while to be accepted by all of them before I realised, 'Oh, hold on, everybody's busking it.' Apart from underground rock, the only thing I knew about was reggae. I'd walked to school with Selwyn Brown, who became the keyboard player in Steel Pulse; he was a lovely guy, a real reggae fundamentalist. When I went to Liverpool, I still looked like a bit of a soul boy, but I was the only one who knew when [*Eric's owner*] Roger Eagle played "Great Stone" by Prince Alla. At the end of that evening, he went over to Geoff Davies, who ran Probe, he got the keys off him and took me there. He picked out all these reggae records that I didn't know, for me to buy. It was a revelation. Next time I went to Eric's, I thought Roger would be my best mate, but he wasn't really friendly! But I went away as my mother's nice son and came back with an earring and a punk haircut. It was easy to fuck parents up then, very easy.

"I HAPPEN TO HAVE BEEN GIFTED, NOT EVEN A TALENT, BUT OPPORTUNISM"

How do you think you'd get on today with the Julian of, say, 1977 and '78? I'd like him. I think he was awash with the possibilities, but the most important thing to do is to surf the right wave, because if you surf the wrong wave it might be successful, but you might be high and dry. Like if Tears For Fears had been successful 18 months before when they were still a ska band... imagine all the angst that we wouldn't have had to endure!

What would that Julian think of you now? I think he'd like that I'm still a rebel. He'd be disappointed I'm no longer revolutionary, but the punk Julian was not revolutionary – he was revolutionary-adjacent, in the common parlance. Mac [*Ian McCulloch*] was never revolutionary, Mac was always about self-interest. I would say Pete Wylie was revolutionary. I think Holly Johnson, Jayne Casey, Pete Burns, they in themselves were revolutionary – as Albert Camus would say, their sheer existence was revolutionary. The fact that The Teardrop Explodes are still so applauded is not totally

DAVID CORIO/REDFERNS; PAUL COX/AVALON.RED



Revolutionary "in themselves": Pete Burns, 1981; (below) Holly Johnson, 1984

positive – well, it is from my point of view – because as great as that Eric's scene was, the cultural change came from Holly Johnson and Pete Burns. What made them so different was that they were confounding to heterosexual males. We lived on the top floor of 24 Devonshire Road, and Pete and Lynne [*Corlett, Burns' wife*] came to live on the ground floor. It was fascinating just to be around people who were living such an alternative lifestyle – because as gay as Peter was, he was also with Lynne! It was very confrontational in a way because, at that point, sexuality was quite basic.

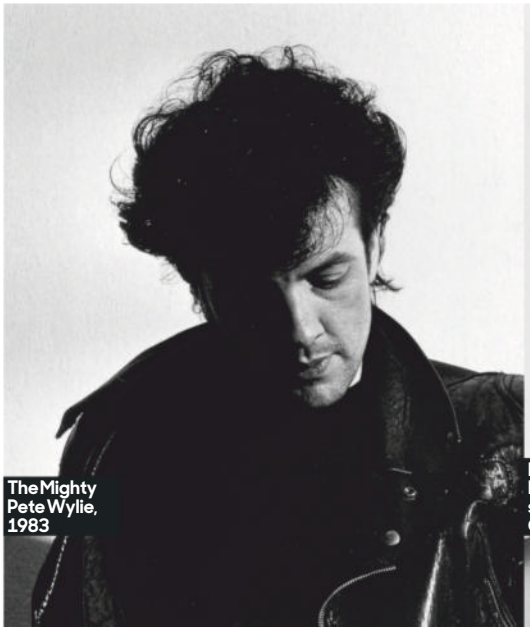
Pete had his own clothes shop, too. Going there was a bit like running the gauntlet, wasn't it? Pete's shop became as much of a hub as Probe for people who dared go in there. Lynne would sit there knitting, I think I wrote in *Head On* she was knitting through the whole of punk. She looked like someone in the French Revolution, like she was just waiting for the head to drop. I remember Joy Division played Eric's. I took Ian Curtis to Peter and Lynne's shop. Pete just totally disparaged Ian as being "ex-Warsaw", even though he really loved Joy Division, but face-to-face he couldn't be generous. Peter Hook blew up his amp, so he had to use mine and I remember thinking, 'Right, Hooky, sound as good as you usually do now you're playing with my [*bad*] amp!', but he still sounded fantastic. It was really disheartening. I saw Joy Division loads of times – I even saw Warsaw about eight times! It's wrong to say they were crap, just insignificant. One of the things that made Joy Division so impressive was it wasn't like Ian Curtis came back with a new backing band, he came back with the same – supposedly – dodos. It's very much an alchemy.

Before all that, The Mystery Girls played their only gig – at Eric's on November 4, 1977. Though it was supporting Sham 69, which kind of negated everything. Pete Burns was the singer, Phil Hurst was the drummer, me on bass and Pete Wylie on guitar. Wylie played with a toilet seat round his neck. Pete Burns said, "I'm not being in a band with fucking Captain Sensible..." We did these lengthy songs, which allowed Pete to ramble and take lyrical potshots at people he was always having a go at when he was at their level – but now he was a foot higher, on the Eric's stage! Peter was very mean to people, even when he liked them very much, so he introduced Phil Hurst as "on fucking drums, it's Phil the wimp". It was all very caustic and horrible. But I was your well-mannered boy... I mean, compared to those guttersnipes!

Groups like Dalek I Love You and Big In Japan were pretty important in that scene then, weren't they? They were great, man. The first time I saw Big In Japan, Jayne [*Casey*] hadn't joined them – I love Jayne but they were better without her. They sounded like they could have been playing in a New York loft, it was really fucking good. You know, I'm wont to be a bit garrulous in my praise, but that was some good shit. Dalek I Love You never got to represent themselves well [*on record*], but they were fucking great. Alan Gill was a very different kind of person, he was a mystery and he was definitely proper psychedelicised. He was my guru – he's what I'd term an intuitive non-career mover.

You picked up a bit of that yourself... Well, I realised it's actually quite a career move to be a non-career mover. So long as you don't fuck with your metaphor, you can add to it a bit at a time and people will look and they'll go, 'Well, he must mean it, because he was kind of saying something similar 10 years ago. He hasn't modified it, he's refreshed it.' People can trust me because they know I mean it, even if they think, 'Well, that's a shit artform...'"

You formed the Crucial Three with Ian McCulloch and Pete Wylie, but that didn't last long. Put it this way, when Mac stopped coming to rehearsals, I was a bit stumped, because I hadn't really thought of myself as a singer. I was a poet with a poetry book. I was Jim Morrison, but I had no idea of reconciling that with being the bass player. So when Ian wanted to do his own things, it took me a while to work out how to convert poetry into lyrics. I had to study my favourite lyric writers and say, 'When can I repeat a lyric rather than just being a wordy git?' If I hadn't served a quick apprenticeship after Mac left, Paul Simpson [*later of Wild Swans*] would have become the Teardrops' singer. I love Paul, but he was such a Bowiehead and I didn't believe we could afford to have a Bowiehead lead singer. ➤



The Mighty Pete Wylie, 1983

Big in the Liverpool punk scene: Jayne Casey, 1980

TRINITY MIRROR/MIRRORPIX/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; DAVE HOGAN/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

You were kind of mentored by Mark E Smith in those days, weren't you? He was important to me and Ian McCulloch. He was a huge help to me because he didn't like Bowie, and everyone else in Liverpool worshipped Bowie. Even Will Sergeant looked like Bowie then! Mark and I were both into heavy stuff that I wouldn't call prog, like Magma, Henry Cow and Faust. We'd talk about this stuff and Mac would be going, "That's just jazz!" Anything he didn't like was "jazz". Mark and I would be talking about Edgar Broughton Band – it was great, because it would lose the Bowie fans. Mark had auditioned for Henry Cow, but they'd been really snooty with him – I hate to even think, because I saw Henry Cow and there was one guy I just wanted to knock out... what a tosser! An animal as a bass player, but he looked like Noël Coward. I was like, "Get to fuck!"

Echo & The Bunnymen in Dublin, March 1982, and (inset) "huge help" Mark E Smith

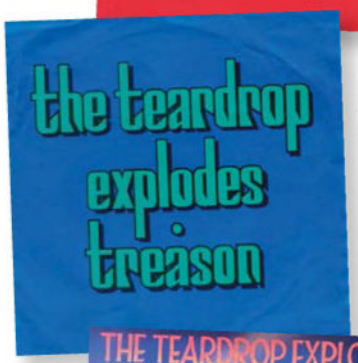
"Sleeping Gas" seemed like it came together really easily. I'd been playing "Ain't It Strange" by Patti Smith. I deconstructed the riff, nicked the two bits that I could play and repeated it. That's all you need! The Teardrops' first TV performance was January '79. It's so funny, it's so basic. We only had seven songs and a lot of them were quite similar. In one song I saw what I was playing on the bass and I saw what Mick Finkler was playing on guitar, and I thought, 'Shit, we had another song that was like that but backwards...'

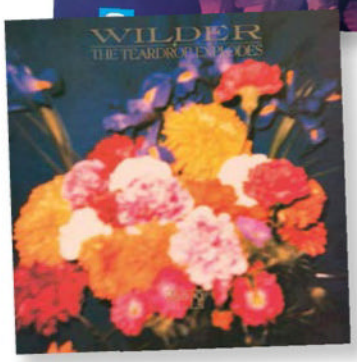
"Treason" was a real jump forward – a proper pop song! Where did that come from? I was goofing on Jake Thackray. I thought, 'What if you did everything on minors?' The Bunnymen had a song called "Stars Are Stars" and it was all minors. I thought that was so cheeky, so I started writing "Treason" on B minor, E minor, F sharp minor, then it goes to G. I immediately started singing this "la la la" thing, like Jake Thackray, and it sounded fucking melodic and beautiful. I always wanted rebellion to be barbarian but smart. It has a lugubrious charm, and a big Gallic gob.

On the other hand, "All I Am Is Loving You" sounds like it was created by people who'd never heard music before. I mean, what the fuck?! That's more intuitive non-career moving. It was a shame when we kicked Mick Finkler out – he was one of those wonderful angular guitarists who received his comeuppance in the studio because we could all suddenly hear what he was playing. "What, have you been playing that live?" "Yeah..." In the early days one of my favourite descriptions of music ever was when Lester Bangs said a guitar solo on the first Blue Cheer album was "bracingly atonal". It's fucking brilliant, it's like a holiday in Scarborough.

Is it true you only discovered drugs when you were recording the Teardrops' first album? I was really anti-drugs before then. I didn't have any money anyway. If they say marijuana is the doorway to harder stuff, then I probably stepped through the doorway and tried acid two and a half weeks later. It was the portal, man. I've always said to my wife that if I get to seven-zero, I might just take up smack. Smack's only a real problem when you're in your twenties. I don't want to be an old tosser and a bore. I had it once, but they didn't tell me it was smack – I just had it because I was into taking drugs. It was one of the best things I've ever experienced. And I just thought, 'Well, I'm never taking that again...' Last time I took acid was on my 50th birthday. I have to say it was revelatory. I don't rule anything out from my life.

The Bunnymen were always much more serious about things, weren't they? Yeah. Les [*Pattinson*] was lovely, but I think joining the Bunnymen dragged him down to become a morose sod. Which he did very well. Whenever he'd come in and hang out with us, you'd get the evil eye from Will and Mac. But the Teardrops, when we were on acid, we were *fun*! I can appreciate the early Bunnymen now – I very much like the first album and I like Side One of the second album a lot. I like that they made so much out of D major! The Bunnymen lost it for me as soon as they became a backing band for Mac's ballads. But you know, he deserved it because he had a lovely voice and [*Liverpool accent*] those bloody lips!





Compared to them, you had a sense of absurdity about things – and acid actually chilled you out for the first time? Completely. Because I realised the whole point of being in a group was to not have to get up in the morning. That was just my biggest fear. But rock'n'roll doesn't really start 'til half 10, does it? That's what I call 'prag-tastic'. Early on, I would go out on these radio tours with Joe Elliott from Def Leppard, because we were both Dave Bates' charges at Polygram. So we both got in the car the first day and I said, "All right" and handed him a five-skinner. He said, "Ah no, I can't have that because

3/31/1982. (PHOTO BY STEVE RAPPORT/GETTY IMAGES; GABOR SCOTT/REDFERNS

With "so rock'n'roll" US wife Dorian in the Orkneys, 1990

Cope at the Lunar Festival in Tanworth-in-Arden, June 2015

Joe Elliott, 1979: no toke

the manager says my eyes'll be red for the photos." I said, "Well, have one now and put some shades on." He says, "No, I can't do that." Of course, all the photos of me after that were either with my eyes looking shit, or with Ray-Bans on, which was perfect because I was a Scott Walker fan.

Did Liverpool lose its appeal once you became a pop star? No, because we didn't go back. I met Dorian [*on the band's 1981 American tour*] and when I came back I left my ex-wife and never went back to the flat. Liverpool thereafter was just an entirely different place. I had to sneak around in doorways because the mob-handed sleuths of my ex-wife were looking for me.

You were run out of town? Well, certainly psychologically I was. I ended up going back to Tamworth, which was absurd. It was like the bloody '50s. But anybody I wanted to see in Liverpool would come and see me there. What was really funny was within a few years, I was living in the middle of nowhere barely hanging on to a record deal and Joe Elliott was an international star. It really summed it up, like, 'Oh, that lack of five-skinners...' Every time I saw the fucker on TV I'd be waving a five-skinner at him!

Back in those early Teardrops days, did you have an idea you'd be making music for decades – or was there not that kind of ambition? I had such a boring life. After I met Dorian I said to her, "My parents are really nice, but when you meet them don't judge them, because there's nothing in the house of any interest whatsoever." She didn't agree, but she almost agreed. Her parents' house was this astonishing cultural mishmash, a collision of her father's Hungarian-German [*heritage*] with my mother-in-law's high Greek, high American [*style*]. I thought, 'Fuck! I want to live in this house. It's the most interesting house in the whole world.' That's all I wanted to do, to live interestingly. Every door opened another door: as soon as Pete Burns wanted to form a band with me and Pete Wylie, I knew that I was accepted by him. As soon as I got the Teardrops together, it meant that we got a gig in America before we had a record deal. That was another foot in the door. Then when I met Dorian – American women are so interesting and Dorian was so rock'n'roll. It kind of went up in increments. I just wanted a really fascinating life.

"THAT'S ALL I WANTED TO DO, TO LIVE INTERESTINGLY"

Speaking of that, do you still get much wear out of your German army hat? Well, my hair's really long at the moment and so right now I've got it up in what I term an 'Iron Age Sharon'. It's like a cross between Pebbles from *The Flintstones* and a kind of high pony... a bit of a man bun, but I'm too cute for a man bun. Do you remember Joyce Grenfell? I look like her. I'm an absolute sight! I'll tell you one of the weirdest things that ever happened with that German hat... I played a festival in Belfast the night before the 25th anniversary of Bobby Sands' death. At that time I was wearing the hat all the time. Next morning, I was seeing a few megaliths and I had a very bluff Brummie, Tom, showing me around. We were driving out of Belfast and he said, "Oh shit, we're going through where Bobby Sands is buried..." Suddenly we're in the middle of an IRA funeral cortege and Tom goes, "Take your fucking hat off, they'll murder you!" I said, "No, I'm keeping my fucking hat on. It's German, they hate the English." Honestly, people in the cortege waved! They thought I was really getting into it, man.

Culture Bunker 1978–82 is out June 2 on UMC

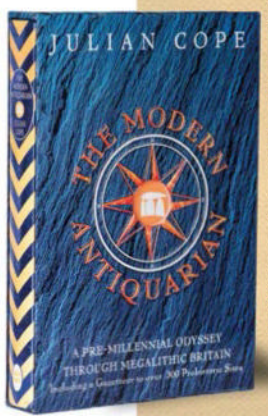
JULIAN CALENDAR

What else is going on in Cope's world

"I DON'T talk to the press at almost any time. What made the Teardrops successful early on was Bill Drummond saying, 'You're not playing in London until you're headlining the Nashville.' Robert, my literary agent, he's the same – he's quite dynamic. He only does what he terms 'singular authors', people like Michael Palin and Ray Mears, and he's in charge of Stephen Hawking's estate. He says, the less [*press*] you do, the more people think it deep.

"At the moment, we're totally hanging fire on what can be arranged to celebrate the 25th anniversary of *The Modern Antiquarian*. One thing I don't want is for the 25th-anniversary edition to come out and I'm like a tired old cunt – 'Oh no, I can't believe I said that in the first version...' Nothing like that. I'd rather stand by what it was, or make it more magnificent and more singular. When it came out, I tried to make it look like the most rock'n'roll book you could ever get, because I didn't want it to belong to some kind of fake Celtic revival that I didn't believe in. I wanted it to be for fuckers.

"I've got another thing I need to do before I die, and that's to put together all my field research for Aberdeenshire and Sardinia. Because I've been to 65 different *tomba dei giganti* [*giants' tombs*] in Sardinia, I know the archaeologists there and I know that they haven't really been to many of them, because they've not been in a position to. In Aberdeenshire, I've been to 107 of the remaining stone circles, and I'm now old enough to be thinking, 'You know what, I have to put this shit together, because I'm not here forever.' It's quite a weird feeling, you know?"



IAN DICKSON/REDFERNS; CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE; STEVE THORNE/REDFERNS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Feed Your Head

Raised in a remote cabin in Arizona on a diet of West Coast classics, KASSI VALAZZA is busy expanding musical traditions in adventurous new ways. But how have a love of *Game Of Thrones*, the mentorship of Lavender Country's Patrick Haggerty and assistance from the "Northwest Wrecking Crew" helped her overcome performance anxiety to find her own voice? "I don't know how I got to do this," she admits to Robert Ham in her hometown of Portland. "It is special."

Photo by KAIT DEANGELIS

ON a typically damp March evening in her hometown of Portland, Oregon, Kassi Valazza is making unnecessary excuses. "I've been on tour a lot lately," she tells 40 or so people who have packed into Lombard House, a tiny pub in the northern end of the city, to hear a short acoustic set from the singer-songwriter. "I'm super healthy when I'm on tour. But I've been home for a bit and when I'm here, I wanna smoke all the time and eat all the food I'm not supposed to. All of which affects the voice. Basically, you're catching me in the middle of a breakdown." Valazza punctuates the last sentence with a laugh and then a rendition of "Light Green Fellow", a 1971 song by one of her musical idols, folk trickster Michael Hurley. Despite her protestations, her voice sounds clear, rich and twangy as she curls it around Hurley's strangely romantic tale of an alien abduction.

The gig was hastily organised to help raise much-needed funds for an upcoming tour. It's a fact that Valazza is slightly embarrassed to mention to the folks in attendance during the hour-long set, which was otherwise made up of material from her self-released 2019 debut *Dear Dead Days* and her latest album, *Knows Nothing*. The new release is a potent and beautiful work that finds the singer-songwriter sifting through the details of broken relationships and family conflicts to find the poetry and truth within them. Providing the music for and the title of this record is rough-and-tumble roots band, TK & the Holy Know-Nothings, who in cahoots with Valazza churn out a mixture of noir-ish country and psych-folk peppered with Crazy Horse-like explosions. The Airplane-ish "Watching Planes Go By" – with lines like "*Ego trips like sunken ships washed ashore/Salted galleons bold and brass you can't ignore*" – was a breakout track on *Uncut*'s recent *Sounds Of The New West Volume 6* CD anthology.

Though charming and effusive between songs, telling self-deprecating stories, when Valazza sings, she does so with head bowed and her face partially obscured by her long blonde hair. "I have had, and still do have, really bad performance anxiety," she says, chatting between sips of green tea at a bustling cafe a few days before the Lombard House show. "I feel like I'm constantly going to faint every time I'm about to play. As a teenager, I tried playing at open mics, but my anxiety could not handle it." When she does quell her nerves and settles into one of her intricately detailed tunes, everyone in the bar seems to lean forward so as not to miss one moment.

"There are times I remember there'd be some sort of rowdy-ish gathering some place and people were passing guitars around," remembers Lewi Longmire, the multi-instrumentalist and member of the Know-Nothings. "She'd be reluctant to share in those situations because a lot of her music is really quiet. But if you could get her to play a song, everybody would just focus in. The magic was obvious. It was apparent from the moment she opened her mouth to sing."

Music has long been a galvanising force in Valazza's life, but until she moved to Portland in 2014 it remained in the background of her other artistic and personal pursuits. "I always gravitated towards musicians," she says. "So all my friends growing up played music. I think that was kind of intimidating because I never felt like I was good enough. I was like, 'That's their thing and my thing will be this thing.'"

"It's a crazy job": Kassi Valazza, embracing both the stress and freedom of being a self-managed artist

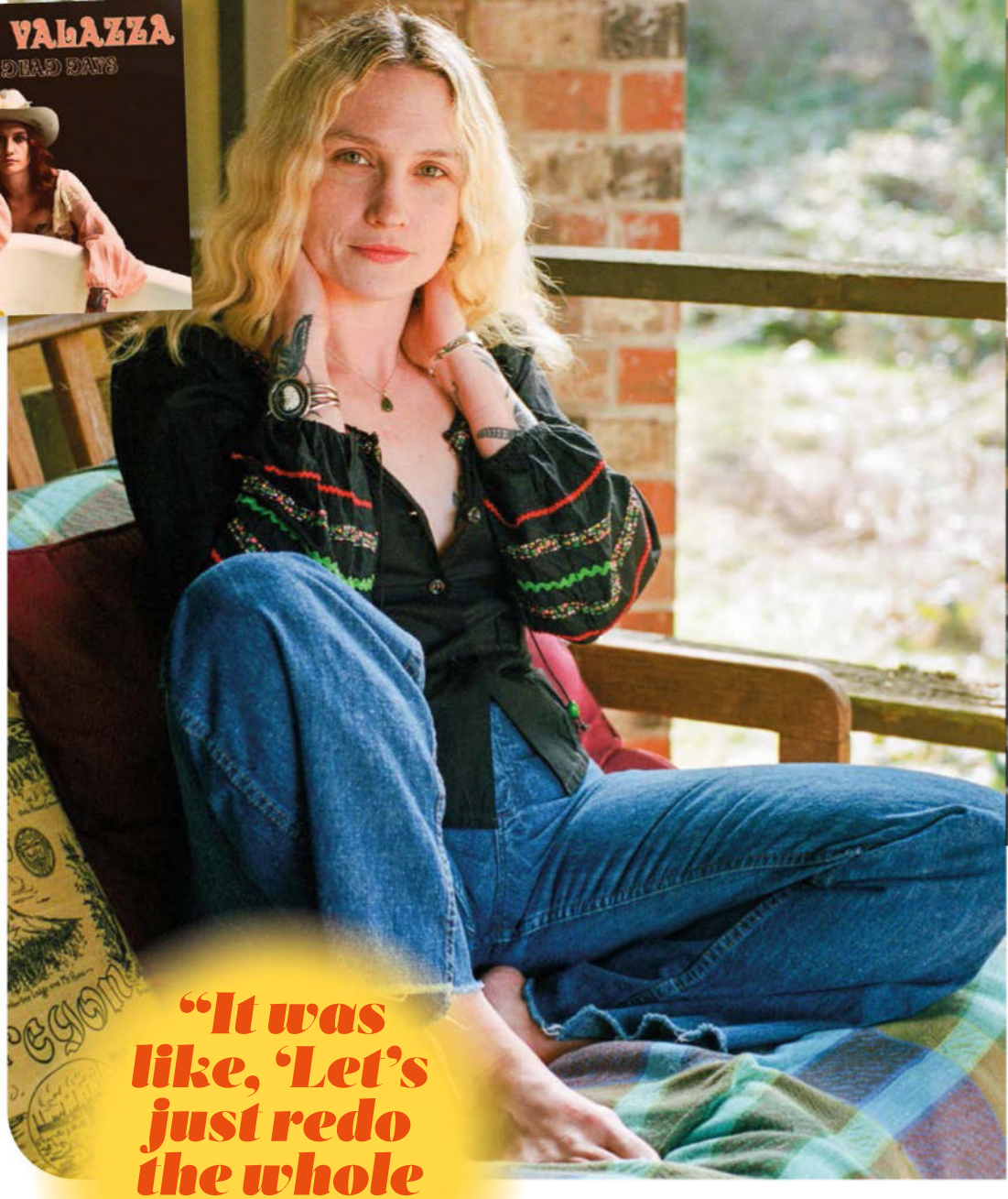
FOR a time, that thing was painting and making other visual art. She attended an arts-focused high school that was a three-hour bus ride away from her home in Arizona, spending her commute absorbed in her portable CD player and sci-fi/fantasy paperbacks. "I got to go to this amazing school in a city full of really artistic, beautiful people," she says. "Then I was back home to the middle of nowhere. I feel like I really got the best of both worlds, at least in my high school years." A year in college at Arizona State University proved to be a turning point for Valazza as she started to feel the pull to make music tugging at her more and more. "I was sitting in a watercolour class, just miserable. It's a watercolour class! I should be having the time of my life. My boyfriend at the time was texting me and giving me the lowdown on *Game Of Thrones*. I was like, 'Fuck this, I'm going home and I'm watching *Game Of Thrones*.' I never went back to school and I'm so grateful."

The "middle of nowhere" that Valazza called home until her early twenties were two remote towns in Arizona where she split time between her parents. "A lot of my childhood was spent with my dad in Prescott, which is the oldest rodeo town in the United States," she says. "I grew up in a cabin that my grandfather built. My mom lives in South Phoenix in the middle of nowhere. These weird vast spaces a little outside of the city."

Before his daughter was born, Valazza's father was a musician playing in a country-folk outfit called Sunny Side Up. He gave it up once Kassi came into the world, but kept his favourite records on heavy rotation in the house. "There was a lot of Crosby, Stills & Nash," Kassi remembers. "Neil Young. He loves Merle Haggard. He didn't listen to anything past the '70s. The '80s were a nightmare for him, so I think he stopped buying music at that point."

As she started to develop a deeper interest in music, both parents were encouraging... to a point. Kassi's father, noting how much she loved Janis Joplin, handed down a copy of Jefferson Airplane's *Surrealistic Pillow*. "I think he wanted me to explore other women from that era," she says. That said, when she did decide to have a go at being a full-time musician, Valazza's father did his best to dissuade her, citing his own struggles as an artist. "He says, 'I always said you shouldn't get into this business,'" she laughs. "'I always told you it's a bad business.' It's non-stop!"

As for her mother, Valazza remembers that her budding interest in music was occasionally met with some pushback. As a teen, when Valazza brought home a CD by the Philly-based rapper Eve, her mother immediately took it away. "She put it in her bedroom and hid it for years," Valazza says, grinning at the memory. "I was the kind of kid that wouldn't cross her. I would just open the drawer and stare at it for an hour and then close the drawer."



"It was like, 'Let's just redo the whole thing'"
• Kassi Valazza

A YEAR after she dropped out of college, Valazza moved to Portland. She had friends living there already and it felt far enough away from her hometown while still being close enough to Arizona to be able to hurry back if her parents needed her. "I had never left home before, so moving here was a fun experience. It was so different. I love the rainforest. It felt like I was in *Ferngully* or *Jurassic Park*. Like, 'This is real?!'" Settled in Portland, she started writing more songs, but was hesitant to play them for anyone beyond her then-partner and a few trusted allies. All of them urged her to share her work with the world, especially Zach Bryson, a country artist beloved in Portland who has since relocated to Nashville. "He was very much like, 'Your songs are good. You should play,'" Valazza says. "He got me to sing some harmonies with him on stage and that got me comfortable."

Valazza was also inspired by the community she found at the LaurelThirst Public House, a cosy venue that has been a hub for American roots music in Portland since the late '80s. Michael Hurley, Scott McCaughey and Alela Diane perform there regularly, as do the members of the Know-Nothings. "That was a big changing point," Valazza acknowledges. "I feel like I met all the people that I now know there." She became another fixture, trying out songs at the weekly open mic and performing with both Bryson and an early band she had joined called Anything West. Many of the musicians she met through the LaurelThirst, like Longmire and North Americans' pedal steel whiz Barry Walker Jr, became trusted collaborators, performing with her live and helping her make *Dear Dead Days*. "A lot of the Americana scene feels like people trying on costumes," Walker says. "I didn't get that feeling with Kassi and her crew."

Though she started to make some waves within the Northwest, Valazza didn't become a known quantity to the larger world until Bryson connected her with Patrick Haggerty, one of the first openly gay country artists who led Lavender Country, a Seattle-based group whose 1973 self-titled album was a cult favourite among record collectors and was re-released by Paradise Of Bachelors in 2014. Around the time of the reissue, Bryson helped Haggerty put together a new

KAIT DEANGELIS

With Lewi Longmire and pooch Jefferson, who both feature on *Knows Nothing*

"Inspiring": the late Patrick Haggerty, February 2022

version of the band for some live dates, asking his friend Valazza to sing harmonies. "I heard the record and was like, 'I absolutely have to be a part of this,'" she says. "'I don't know how it's going to go. It's probably gonna be a nightmare, but I'm gonna do it.'" Valazza printed out all the lyrics from the *Lavender Country* album, tentatively bringing them with her to the first rehearsal. Haggerty sensed her nerves immediately and pulled her aside. "He dragged me into a different room and was like, 'I dare you to upstage me. I really want you to.' He could see how self-conscious I was and wanted to break me of that."

For the next five years, Valazza performed as a member of Lavender Country off and on, touring the country with them and contributing to the band's final statement, the 2019 album *Blackberry Rose And Other Songs And Sorrows From Lavender Country*. As her own career started taking off, Valazza had to step away from the project, though she kept in touch with Haggerty through the last years of his life. He passed away in November 2022. "Playing with him was inspiring for many reasons, but that was a project where I feel like I really got to blossom as a performer," she says. "I don't know how I got so lucky to get to be a part of that."

TOURING with Lavender Country and getting regular gigs around the Northwest afforded Valazza the luxury of taking her time to record her debut album, *Dear Dead Days*. The process took the better part of two years, with friends John Wohlfert and Cary Sigler turning her home into a makeshift studio. She invited various friends over to add parts as they became available. Walker recorded his contributions in his home with Valazza and Sigler overseeing the session. "My model was the Michael Nesmith/Red Rhodes dynamic," Walker says, referring to the musical relationship between the former Monkee and the pedal steel player in the First National Band. "Red would just weave in and out of Nesmith's vocal lines. So I was trying to vibe on that."

The creation of *Dear Dead Days* wasn't an entirely smooth process, however. "There was a person that had been on the album that I wasn't comfortable with them being on the album any more," Valazza says, "so we rerecorded their parts. Then I started writing new songs. It was like, 'Let's just redo the whole thing.' I'm really glad we did." One song that wound up getting added late in the game was the album highlight "Chino", a country rambler about her decision to uproot her life in Arizona in her early twenties.

Word spread quickly once *Dear Dead Days* was released in 2019, a remarkable feat for a self-released album. To this day, she's still responsible for mailing out copies to fans or, as she was doing at her Lombard House gig, selling them out of the boot of her car. "It's super neat seeing who's buying the vinyl. When I see places like Portugal and Germany, I'm like, 'What the fuck? How do these people even know me?'" As her fan base grew, more opportunities came her way like a month-long run opening for Riley Downing and a tour of Scandinavia in early 2022. "That was weird and crazy," she says. "You grow up with not a lot of money and never imagine that you're gonna be anywhere outside of where you grew up. It's a crazy job. I still have no money but I'm getting to do things that other people with my net income would not be able to do."

Valazza's frugal mindset was no small factor in the appeal of working with the Know-Nothings. Taylor Kingman, the leader of the group, was converting an old schoolhouse 40 minutes south of Portland into a recording studio and invited Valazza and fellow rootsy singer-songwriters Bart Budwig and John Craigie to record some songs with the Know-Nothings backing them up. "We've always wanted to be a kind of Northwest Wrecking Crew for our friends," Kingman says. "It's a well-oiled band that already really works well together. Kassi was an obvious choice. Let's have her at the head of the snake and try to make something together." The experience was an inspiring one for all involved. "I think that really opened Kassi's eyes," says Longmire. "'Oh, that worked well. Maybe we'll just do a whole record like this.'"

"When I came in," Valazza says, "I [*told them*] I don't want this to be a country album. I wanted them to focus on the '60s and '70s and not go outside that sound. That's what they listen to, so it was perfect." The sessions for *Knows Nothing* went quickly, with the band constantly swapping instruments and following Valazza's lead to find the right feel for every song. "It's a nice balance of me knowing exactly what I want and then also having these really good ideas from the band and then we combined the two." Apart from a few overdubs, nearly the whole album was recorded live, giving the songs an organic warmth and energy redolent of *The Basement Tapes*. "Corners" is bookended by "Be My Baby" downbeats, but in between pedal steel and dobro add a shimmering calm to Valazza's lyrics of romantic desperation. Later on the album, "Welcome Song" starts on a tentative note of electric piano and acoustic guitar, building steadily to a long psych-rock coda. Listen close and you'll even catch the bark of Longmire's dog Jefferson on a pair of tunes.

PICKING occasionally at a sticky pastry and straining to be heard over the clamour of children at the family-friendly cafe where she met with *Uncut*, Valazza doesn't seem at all bothered by what may come next for her following the release of *Knows Nothing*. She's happy to have the responsibility of getting the vinyl and CDs for the new album pressed and distributed taken off her hands by Fluff & Gravy and her European label Loose. It leaves her plenty of time to concentrate on writing new material and catching up with the books in Megg Jansen's *Dragonlands* series.

The pressure of being a self-managed artist is never far away though. At the end of the interview, Valazza headed off to meet up with fellow independent artist Mike Coykendall to work through her taxes for 2022 and then to start packing up for a short tour of the Southern states. Talking about her work, it seems, is the only time she's able to take stock of everything. "I don't know how I got to do this. It is special. The more stressed I get, the more I try to remember that. If, four years ago, I could look at myself now, I'd be like, 'What do you have to complain about? Literally nothing at all.'"

Knows Nothing is released by Loose (Europe) and Fluff & Gravy (USA) on May 30

Albums that inspired *Knows Nothing*

FAIRPORT CONNECTION
LIEGE & LIEF 1969
"There's a lot of dark, cool jams that happen on that album. They'll play these beautiful almost Irish ballads and then all of a sudden you're 10 minutes deep into the song. There's so much heaviness on the album that's almost like metal."

MICHAEL HURLEY
IDA CON SNOCK 2009
"What I love about his recordings is that sometimes they're not good and it is just him with a recorder in the room. So for our cover of 'Wildegeeses' from this album, we set up on mic and everybody played around it. I wanted to capture the Hurley-ness."

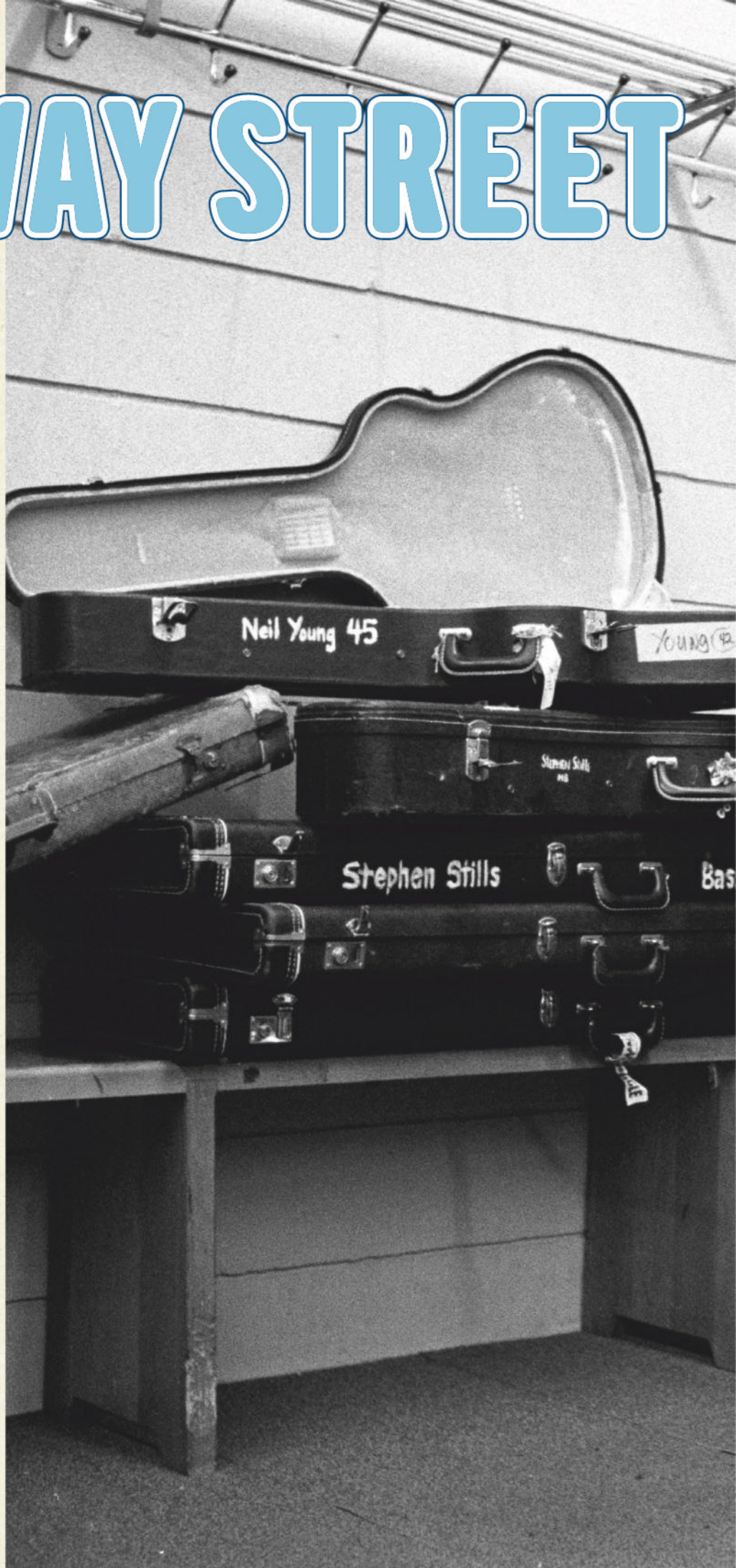
THE PENTANGLE
SWEET CHILD 1968
"There's a couple of their live albums that I got really into, but this is the one I had on repeat because of 'No More My Lord', which is a really heavy, primal jam."

KAIT DEANGELIS, ASSOCIATED PRESS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ONE WAY STREET

In 1970, STEPHEN STILLS escaped from his CSNY bandmates, moved to deepest Surrey and launched a lively solo career with a little help from his new mates. Stand by for jams with Hendrix, cameos from Ringo and Clapton, studio casualties and heavy scenes on the road. "It was a lucky streak," Stills tells Michael Bonner

Photo by HENRY DILTZ



WALK down Farnham Road, past the village green, the Spar and The Mill (cask ales and "stunning riverside garden"), turn right onto Fulbrook Lane and eventually you'll arrive at a handsome red-stone building partly obscured from the road behind a high wooden fence. Today, it is one of many similarly desirable period residences, tucked away in the heart of deep Surrey. But during the late '60s and early '70s, Brookfield House was a Home Counties outpost of Swinging London. In 1968, Ringo Starr bought Brookfield from Peter Sellers – it was here that The Beatles gathered to persuade George Harrison to rejoin the band after he walked out of the *Let It Be* Twickenham Studios sessions in January 1969.

The following year, meanwhile, Brookfield passed into the hands of another celebrated owner. "I stayed in England after CSNY's first Albert Hall concert in January 1970," says Stephen Stills. "I fell in love with the place, I fell in love with the culture. I fell in love with my mates. Everyone was very friendly. I told the guys, 'I'm not going back to California with you.' It was invigorating, like plugging into a 220-volt socket. I ended up at Ringo's house – he was my first friend in England. He was just fabulous to be with. We sat and played and noodled about. Then Maureen said, 'We're getting rid of the house in Surrey. Would you like it?' We drove down the next morning. I walked in and said, 'Yes, I'll have it.'"

Aside from the stables, pond and ornamental gardens, what else did this oak-beamed 16th-century mansion have to offer Stephen Stills? A team player in Buffalo Springfield and CSN/Y, a multi-instrumentalist and arranger, with a ➤

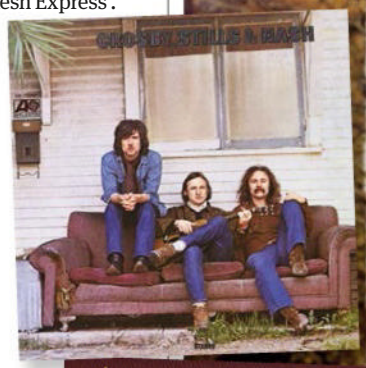
Stills backstage for a CSNY show at the Metropolitan Sports Arena, Bloomington Minnesota, July 9, 1970. Taken from Henry Diltz' forthcoming book, *CSN&Y: Love The One You're With*, available for pre-order now from Genesis Publications

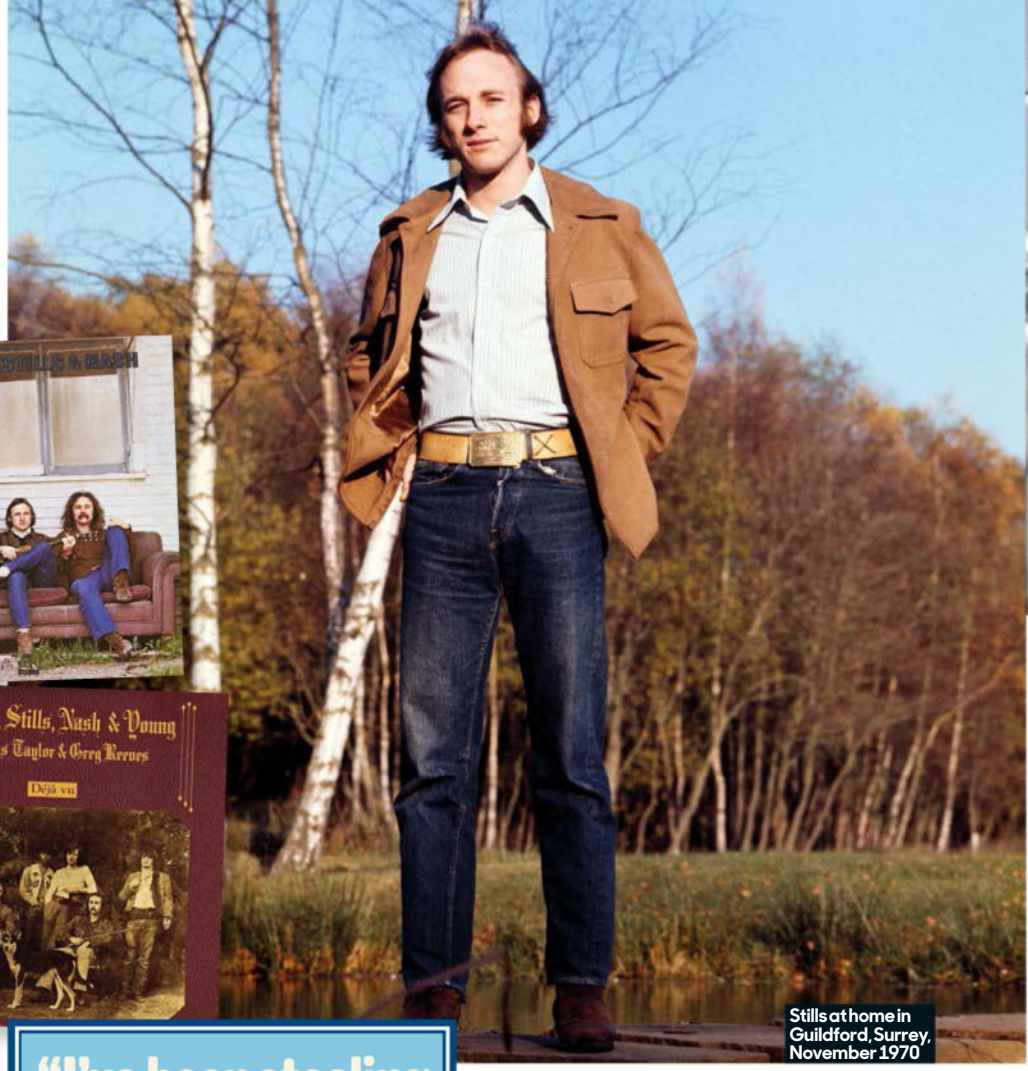
Grammy in his back pocket for *Crosby, Stills & Nash* and further success imminent with *Déjà Vu*, there wasn't much Stills couldn't do in 1970.

"Stephen played almost every single instrument on our first record," Graham Nash tells *Uncut*. "Of course, Crosby and I played rhythm guitar on 'Long Time Gone', 'Guinnevere', 'Lady Of The Island' and 'Marrakesh Express'. But Stephen played lead guitar, rhythm guitar, bass, B3, piano, percussion.... My point is, Stephen Stills is a brilliant record maker."

An hour's drive by Ferrari to central London – but, perhaps more pertinently, over 5,000 miles from LA – Brookfield provided a base from which Stills could assert himself as a solo artist. Accordingly, the two solo albums he made in 1970 and 1971, much of them in London, covered a lot of ground. There's acoustic moves, blues looseness, gospel blowouts and even chart success with "Love The One You're With" – assisted in the collaborative spirit of the times by A-list players including Hendrix, Clapton, Ringo, Booker T, the Memphis Horns and Billy Preston. Released this month, *Live At Berkeley 1971* captures Stills back in California at full tilt during this prolific period.

"I had far too many songs," he laughs. "They were coming out of me, right and left. Some of them were pretty bad, but some of them were rather good. I had been reliant on the group atmosphere, sort of hiding in, and it was time to break out. I needed that confidence builder of a Grammy. I just took off from there."





Stills at home in Guildford, Surrey, November 1970

"I've been stealing from Jeff Beck all my career – but who hasn't?"

STEPHEN STILLS

TODAY, speaking from his current home in the Hollywood Hills between Sunset and Ventura, Stephen Stills is considering the pros and cons of launching his solo career back in 1970. "When it's just one of you, there's not so many arguments, are there?" He laughs. "That can be a two-edged sword. You know, if everyone does exactly what you tell them, then... *they do exactly what you tell them*. That can be fraught with danger. Music is a collaborative art form, after all."

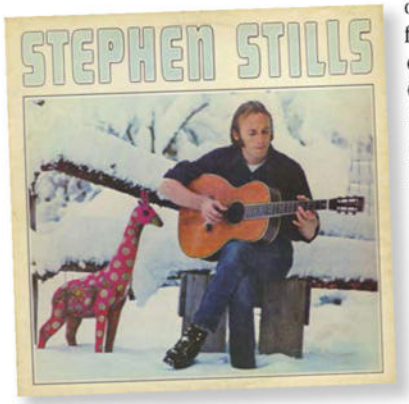
This is very much Stephen Stills in 2023. Lots of laughter; self-awareness; strong on insight; low tolerance for idiocy. When talk turns to David Crosby – who appears on the *Live At Berkeley 1971* album – the humour abates temporarily. "Part of me is really sad that he's gone," he says quietly. "But part of me thinks he got out of here just in time, with the world going to hell in a hand basket like it is. But I miss him. I loved him. He was a soulmate. What more can I tell you?"

Stills had stepped outside the confines of a band before – when he received co-billing on Al Kooper's 1968 *Super Session* album, taking Donovan's "Season Of The Witch" in impressive new directions. "The wah-wah on 'Season On The Witch' was an expansion of something I'd been working on," says Stills, "having discovered from Jimi the miracle of the wah-wah pedal when used correctly, with some taste and correct tension, much like Jeff Beck used the volume pedal. I've been stealing from Jeff Beck all my career – but who hasn't?"

By 1970, cracks were beginning to show with Stills' regular gig. Bill Halverson, who recorded both *Crosby, Stills & Nash* and *Déjà Vu*, recalls how a different set of decisions were being privileged when he reconvened with them for *Déjà Vu*. "The first album was a wonderful in-studio vibe. With *Déjà Vu*, we're getting something done, then the managers come in to talk about a tour and everybody starts arguing. By the time the managers leave, it takes another day to get everybody in a good vibe again. There were a lot of distractions."

In England, Stills began writing – though he became aware, swiftly, of the potential perils of creating in isolation. "When you're in bands, you're always writing for someone," he explains. "I was always trying to impress Neil. Then I wanted to impress these new friends in England. So I kept a guitar very close and always have writing paper and a pen. You never knew when the muse would strike. But you have to be careful. You have to edit yourself and if you don't have bandmates around to help, you run into some bad rhymes. Sometimes it's just complete bollocks!"

WORK began on Stephen Stills' debut album at Island's Basing Street Studios in early 1970. Although it was Stills' name above the door, he still called on some powerful friends to help out. One of the earliest guests at the sessions was Jimi Hendrix. Multiple observers confirm that his time in Basing Street was recorded – "the tape was *always* running" – but only one complete song to feature Hendrix appeared on the album – "Old Times Good Times" a modish R&B shuffle which finds Stills on organ trading licks with Hendrix. "When we were together, we were close. We were very brother-like. But getting together was a pain in the ass, *then* we'd make room for each other. I asked



MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Recording *Crosby, Stills & Nash* with Bill Halverson at Wally Heider Studio 3, Hollywood, CA, March 1969

Jimi to play; he said, 'Sure.' I'd played some bass for Jimi."

Another gifted – if less storied – participant was the Antiguan-born, Tottenham-raised bassist Calvin 'Fuzzy' Samuel. He bluffed his way into a session at Basing Street in the company of his friend and one-time bandmate, the drummer Conrad Isidore. He ended up staying, becoming a regular fixture on Stills' early solo records and, later, in CSNY.

"Fuzzy was this wonderful, beautiful spirit," says Stills. "He taught us Antiguan slang. You know, instead of hungry he'd say, 'I'm *nyamish*.' He was a remarkably quick study, too."

"Stephen was very cocky, right," says Samuel. "But not in a bad way. He was 25. He had all the money in the world, he could do anything. But he was very talented and knew what he wanted. He had the songs. He was also a very giving person. He helped me to get a house. It's not the side you see of him on album covers with the cars. He came over as arrogant, but that was a front."

Another member of Stills' extended musical family, Bill Halverson was working on Eric Clapton's solo album with Delaney Bramlett in Los Angeles when Stills called, insisting he come to Basing Street. "Andy Johns had done a couple of days with Hendrix and Stephen when I got there and took over. Stephen was on a mission to get some music out. After we do a basic track, he'd have all these ideas for overdubs. He'd do a song four or five times, then put harmony parts on, then another harmony and something else. Then he'd go, 'No, I don't like it.' So we'd erase it all, start over. But he'd be three ideas ahead."

"A lot of times, there would be complete left turns," confirms Stills. "We'd have to reset what we'd already done." This included the work done on "Love The One You're With", which went through several significant changes on its way to completion [*see panel*]. The picture that emerges of Stills is a man in charge of his agenda, confident enough in what he's doing to revise and remake songs on the studio floor, bolstered by his considerable skills as both musician and arranger.

"I put the arranging chops back to my band teachers in high school," he says. "When I first started playing music, I played the drums. I got a trombone to make musical noises for a while, but that was far too difficult. That carried me through, though. I was like a sponge. I went to have a little short experience of directing in school. So it's all of a piece, isn't it? Your life experience. I'd chosen that as my path early on, that I was going to be a musician. Otherwise I'd have to get a fucking job, and I didn't want to get a fucking job."

AT Basing Street, sessions ran from 7pm to 7am, although the serious business of recording didn't start until after midnight. "We would jam every night for about six hours before we started recording," recalls Samuel. "You know the song 'Tequila'? We jammed on that one for *four and a half hours*. Me, Stills, Clapton and Dallas Taylor. Every time I see Clapton, he says, 'They'll find it when we're all dead!' Because Stephen kept the tape. Also, if you're playing that long, you can't stop to take drugs."

"Eric had got sick and tired of Delaney," explains Halverson. "He came over to London, turned up at Basing Street and said to Stephen, 'Can I have some of your studio time to finish my album with Bill?' Stephen goes, 'Yeah, OK. I've got this tune I want you to play guitar on.' Eric says, 'Well, I got something you can play on, too.' So Eric played on 'Go Back Home' – he played his tail off! – and Stephen played on 'Easy Now', on Eric's album."

"Eric mentioned, 'Oh, I'd love to play acoustic guitar,'" says Stills. "So we went, 'Take a break! We'll be right with it.' We scurried around, I gave him a guitar, Bill set him up and we were able to come through for him. He played 'Easy Now' in one take. I gave him that guitar for keeps. It was only fair."

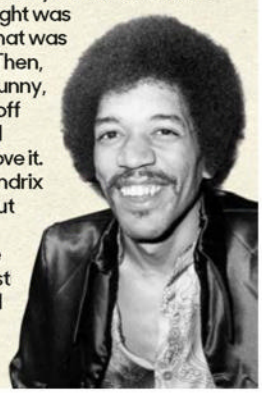
Heavy friends like Clapton aside, Stills also found time for expansive digressions and interesting playing. On a couple of occasions, he would disappear into the darkness of the studio on his own. "For 'Black Queen', I was upstairs [*in the control booth*] and Stephen's out in the room," says Halverson. "He's doing some drugs and stuff. I can hear him wandering around the mic. I've got the multi-track recording and he finally came over to the microphone and did 'Black Queen'. ➤

"IN WALKED HENDRIX..."

Calvin 'Fuzzy' Samuel lifts the lid on a lost take of "Love The One You're With"

"WHEN I first heard it, it was a jingle-jangle 12-string song. I said to Stephen, 'Why don't you give me some money and I'll go and get some Africans.' So I got Jeff Whittaker and Gaspar Lawal and we took a steel drum back to the studio. In walked Hendrix [*below*] and I almost fainted. 'OK...'

"I thought we'd finished the song, totally finished it. But one night, Stephen dragged me out of bed at four o'clock in the morning. 'We're going back to the studio.' I had been playing something at rehearsals on my own. It's a thing I developed, playing bass with one finger one way and another finger another way. He said, 'That kind of thing you were playing at rehearsal? Let's try it on "Love The One You're With".' That became the bassline. To keep that in his head like, 'Oh, this could actually work, not the one we thought was going', that was genius. Then, what's funny, he took off the steel drum. I love it. Even Hendrix is on it. But he's got the tape and most likely will not let it out."



Keys to his art: Stills in March 1969

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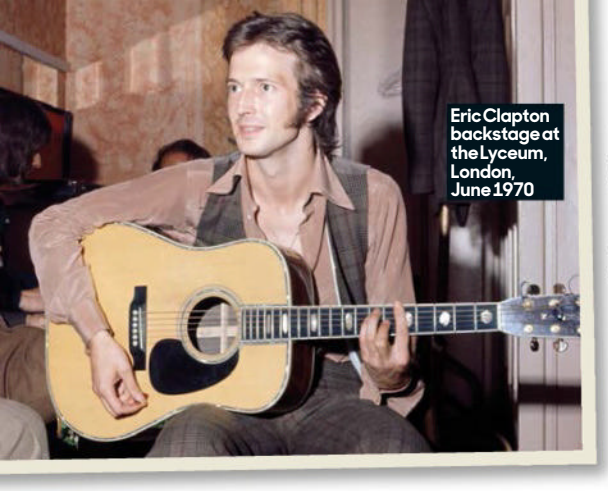


Eric Clapton backstage at the Lyceum, London, June 1970

He sang it, played it; it was the whole performance. Then he's start wondering around. We did this for two hours. I got three takes of 'Black Queen'. We picked up the one we liked best, which was the first one, and put it on the album."

After Basing Street, Stills finished the album in LA at Wally Heider's. There they recorded "Cherokee", about Stills' current partner, Rita Coolidge. Amidst the electric sitar and jazzy horns, you can hear alto flute from Sidney George. "He was a young studio player in LA trying to make a living," says Halverson. "He kept bringing all these instruments in from his car. Stephen fell in love with what he was doing. Folks like Dallas and David, they didn't get union wages – but he was an overdub musician, so he did. After we got done, Stephen said, 'Yeah, let's pay him what he should be paid.' With all the overdubs, it was like $3,700. It was the biggest check the kid has ever had!"

In May and June 1970, Stills regrouped with Crosby, Nash and Young for a 23-date tour – including six shows at the Fillmore East in New York. Graham Nash has fond memories of being among his bandmates at work: "Night after night after night, I stood between Stephen and Neil, watching them. I was fascinated by how they conversed together, purely using their guitars."

Barracked at close quarters, however, strong personalities clashed. "I was developing an annoying control freak streak," Stills admits now. "I wasn't satisfied with the band. We were always fussing over stuff too much or they were fussing about me fussing too much."

The competition only became more acute when, in the space of a few short months, all four members of CSNY released solo albums: Young's *After The Gold Rush* (September 1970), Stills' self-titled album (November 1970), Crosby's *If I Could Only Remember My Name* (February 1971) and Nash's *Songs For Beginners* (May 1971). These are potent documents – from Young's bittersweet farewell to the hippie dream to Crosby's ethereal, grief-stricken jams – but Stills felt confident that he'd pulled something out of the hat here. "We had all come to think quite a lot of ourselves," he says now.

> **"Stephen and Neil conversed together, purely using guitars"**
>
> **GRAHAM NASH**

BY the time of his second album, the mood had changed. *Stephen Stills II* was written during winter 1970/'71 in the shadow of CSNY's collapse, Coolidge's defection to Nash and the death of Hendrix. Stills threw himself into songwriting back at Brookfield. This new batch of songs included "Change Partners" and "Open Secret", which appeared to reference the recent upheavals in Stills' private life. "It was a lucky streak," he says. "There's streaks. It's like surfing – there's always another wave, but when you've got a good wave you ride it. Or if it's a horse you ride him until he bucks you."

In February 1971, Stills returned to Basing Street with Bill Halverson once again and a core band of Calvin Samuel, keyboard player Paul Harris and Dallas Taylor.

"Dallas was my co-conspirator," acknowledges Stills. "He was as good as anybody at playing a song and playing the arrangement. I always thought that was critical to drummers, take the lead, you can't just jam the thing. We were mates, too, going through our last stages of growing up together – or at least, as far as we wanted to go."

"A lot of the time in CSN, Dallas and Stephen built the songs," says Samuel. "The rest of them hardly played. Dallas could hear a song with just Stephen singing it and he'd know where to put the fills. Ringo would only play hi-hats sometimes, that's how the songs could breathe. Dallas was the same. Stephen always knew how to hand-pick players. I once asked him why they chose me, over everyone else, and he said it was because I didn't get in the way of the words."

Stills also brought over to England Billy Preston and the Memphis Horns, who spent six weeks in Basing Street. Thinking back to the horn overdubs that gave "Season Of The Witch" its bluesy swing, Stills evidently wanted some more roll to go with his rock. "The Memphis Horns were incredible, they were willing to try anything Stephen wanted," says Halverson. "Stephen abused the crap out of Wayne Jackson. We ended up in the studio for over 24 hours with him, trying to satisfy Stephen with this one part, to the point where he was starting to get a blister on his lip. We just wore him out."

The sessions, though, were longer and more intense than for the previous album. Relocating to Miami's Criteria Studios, Stills marshalled his troops with military intensity. "The Albert Brothers were my assistant engineers," says Halverson. "They would take turns because we'd work like 24 hours straight. They worked eight hours and then another guy would work some."

"We kept going to studios in Miami, then to studios in LA, cutting and recutting the songs," says Samuel. Among the guests corralled into Stills' studio regime were Jerry Garcia, Nils Logfren, Dr John and Booker T. The work completed, *Stephen Stills II* was released in June 1971, barely six months after its predecessor.

Reviews, however, were not kind: according to *Rolling Stone* magazine, it was "lackluster and

Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young live at Olympia Stadium, Detroit, June 12, 1970

KOHHASEBE/SHINKOMUSIC/GETTYIMAGES; TOMCOPI/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTYIMAGES

Stills and (inset, below) Dallas Taylor, Berkeley, 1971

undistinguished". All the same time, Stills prepared to head out on his first ever solo tour. "We were young and enthusiastic and in love with what we were doing," he says. "I weighed 130 pounds and nothing hurt, *ever*."

AS it transpired, Stills' optimism took a pounding early on. The Stephen Stills Band – comprising Stills, guitarist Steve Fromholz, Calvin Samuel, Dallas Taylor and percussionist Joe Lala – made their debut on June 27, 1971 headlining the Celebration Of Life festival, held on a 700-acre plantation on the banks of the Atchafalaya River in McCrea, Louisiana. But a confluence of bad weather, drugs, clashes with the authorities and dismal organisation led to chaos, violence and at least three confirmed fatalities. It was hardly the most auspicious start. As the tour progressed, with the band now accompanied by the Memphis Horns, some venues were under capacity. At the time, Stills dug in – so fortified, he later dubbed the excursion "the Drunken Horns tour".

Today, Stills is keen to focus on the heavy lifting done by his fellow musicians: "We had formed this band and busted our chops to get the horn charts together. We went out there and blazed. But, yeah, every time there was a full house, I was so relieved."

On July 30, the band reached Madison Square Garden. Stills himself takes pride in the minor wear and tear they left on the venue. "I put three cracks in the walls by getting the crowd jumping up and down," he smiles. "The fire marshal and the head engineer got quite disturbed. So I went 'OK, I'll calm down.'"

The following night, August 1, George Harrison's Concert For Bangladesh took place. "Chip [*Monck*] told me about it so I said, 'Well, I'll just leave my gear and you guys can have it.' I expected to be invited, but I think the bill was full. I never took it *that* personally."

A motorcycle accident, where Stills tore his knee ligaments, threatened to derail the rest of the tour. Despite this latest setback, it finally reached San Francisco's Berkeley Community Theater on August 21 and 22. As you can hear on *Live In Berkeley 1971*, the band are confident and engaged: "I was very enthusiastic. You can tell by how fast everything is," says Stills. Among the high-energy rock and soul revue vibes, there are a handful moments where another side to Stills emerges – in particular "Know You've Got To Run" and "Word Games", which bring into focus his deft fingerpicking techniques and unconventional tunings. Did Stills ever consider recording an entire album like this?

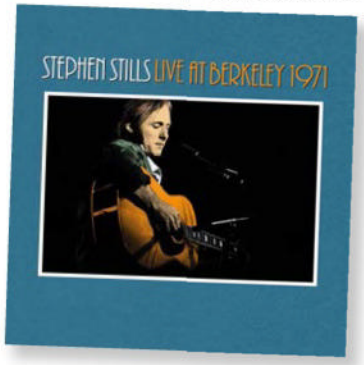
"Well, Bob Dylan, of all people, told me that I should," he reveals. "I thought about it for a minute, then the group intervened. A lot of that stuff was just sheer nerve. I had no idea what was gonna come out. The banjo is blind luck. I have no idea how to play it. I tune it like a guitar and pick it."

The album also finds Stills joined by David Crosby for beautiful versions of Stills' "You Don't Have To Cry" and Crosby's "The Lee Shore" – reminders of how different as songwriters they were, but also how well the autumnal harmonies bound them together. "David turned up in the dressing room before the show," reveals Stills. "We decided to do those two songs. It was totally off the cuff, as you could probably tell by the quality of the singing. We went out and winged it. We had the confidence of twentysomethings!"

WHILE for Stills this solo project continued to fulfil its conceptual potential, an ending was in sight. After regrouping in Miami with Samuel, Taylor and Harris for a third solo album, their plans changed abruptly with a visit from Chris Hillman. "He said, 'This sounds like a band,'" says Samuel. "Next thing we know, we stayed in the studio in Miami for three or four months. That's when the first Manassas album came."

Perhaps, after all, Stills was more comfortable back in a band once again? After two Manassas albums, CSNY reformed for *4 Way Street* and again for their 1974 tour with its fabled Wembley Stadium show. Stills has sporadically revisited his solo career ever since, to varying degrees of success. However, these early records – particularly the first Stephen Stills album – offer sustained creative momentum. If there's pure genius in *Live In Berkeley 1971*, it's how Stills turns vault recordings from the final dates of a difficult tour into an essential purchase.

"They were the salad years, never shall they be replicated," reflects Stills on his fecund 1970–1971. "I'm very proud of the work I did there. I just couldn't stop, could I? It was completely compulsive. There was a freedom to it. Lovely people, larking about Britain and Europe. It was a great adventure."



Stephen Stills' Live At Berkeley 1971 is available now from Iconic Artists Group and Omnivore Recordings. Graham Nash interviewed by Erin Osmon

HEY, CHILDREN, WHAT'S THAT SOUND?

Five great Stephen Stills songs that aren't "For What It's Worth" or "Love The One You're With"...

BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD "BLUEBIRD" [BUFFALO SPRINGFIELD, 1973]
Originally released at half the length on *Buffalo Springfield Again*, this nine-minute take was a spectacular indicator of where Stills was headed. The Springfield are in jam band mode, looping around Stills' acoustic fingerpicking and Young's electric solos.

CROSBY, STILLS & NASH "SUITE: JUDY BLUE EYES" [CROSBY, STILLS & NASH, 1969]
Opening CSN's debut, this not only introduced the group's three-part harmonies, it also established Stills as a fiercely precocious talent. Written for Stills soon-to-be ex-flame Judy Collins, its multiple sections unfold across seven minutes of life-affirming joy.

STEPHEN STILLS "BLACK QUEEN" [STEPHEN STILLS]
Although Hendrix only appeared on one song on Stills' debut – "Old Times Good Times" – you could imagine him approving of this riotous blues workout. "Hendrix was into blues," says Samuel. "But they all knew the blues wasn't going to make you hits."

CROSBY, STILLS, NASH & YOUNG "CARRY ON" [DÉJÀ VU]
Written in 'Bruce Palmer modal tuning' – adapted from his former Springfield bandmate, where nearly every string is tuned to E – this draws on Springfield's "Questions", with a free-form jam with Taylor added as a coda.

STEPHEN STILLS "CHANGE PARTNERS" [STEPHEN STILLS II]
This yarn about society ball etiquette – although it could also, perhaps, be about Graham Nash stealing his girlfriend – is delivered as baroque folk and enhanced by beautiful pedal steel from Jerry Garcia. One of the keepers from Stills' second solo album.

Weekender

by Flowered Up

Go out and have a good, good time

NOBODY expected a bunch of Camden tearaways to make one of the defining cultural artefacts of the early 1990s. Yet somehow Flowered Up pulled it off with "Weekender", an epic 12-minute stew of rock, dub and techno, book-ended with samples from *Quadrophenia*. As a song, "Weekender" was way out there, but with its accompanying video it became something else entirely, a brilliantly conceived celebration and critique of acid house, capturing the scene just as it imploded. This was a musical vision that epitomised Flowered Up's rule-breaking approach to life.

The five-piece – plus the band's charismatic manager Des Penney and flower-headed mascot Barry Mooncult – had emerged from a north London estate, hyped as the capital's answer to the Happy Mondays. After a couple of singles with Heavenly, they signed to London Records, but their debut album *A Life With Brian* failed to cut through. They bounced back with "Weekender", but even with Clive Langer's production skills, the track was too much, too wild, for a major label. Re-signing to Heavenly, label owner Jeff Barrett decided to pair the song with a promotional film. Taking a lead from *Quadrophenia*, director Andrew "Wiz" Whiston – another mainstay of the club scene – combined social realism with music video surrealism to document the weekend of a clubber, played by actor Lee Whitlock, then best known for the primetime ITV drama series *Shine On Harvey Moon*.

Banned by the BBC, "Weekender" became a cult classic. The band celebrated with a typically debauched party organised by Mooncult in a squatted mansion. But for some members of Flowered Up – most notably lead singer Liam Maher – ecstasy gave away to harder drugs and it proved increasingly difficult to keep the band together. They played their last show on New Year's Eve in 1993.

After a brief reunion in 2005, Liam Maher died of a heroin overdose in 2009. His brother Joe died three years later following mental health and heart problems. Lee Whitlock, meanwhile, died from cancer in February 2023. But these tragedies should not overshadow one of the great artistic statements to come out of any counterculture: a song and film which unflinchingly captured the experiences of a generation. ***PETER WATTS***

JEFF BARRETT: Des Penney started Flowered Up with Liam. The band would rehearse in the local community centre on their estate, smoking and dealing weed. Des and Liam were the wilder, madder, more clubby pair. Des says he first told me about the band at Spectrum, the Monday night at Heaven. What I remember very clearly is that Liam was a Face and I quite frankly didn't give a fuck if he could sing or not. I just felt, in a pure Loog Oldham/Tin Pan Alley way that he was a pop star.

TIM DORNEY: I'd been working with Andrew Weatherall and Flowered Up were looking for a keyboard player, so he gave Des my number. I am a middle-class boy from Windsor, so it was a baptism of fire. Joe and Liam would go at it hammer and tongs, fist fights and everything over the smallest of things. On tour, I discovered the true horrors, particularly with Barry Mooncult. He had a hooligan reputation because of his Chelsea days but he was hilarious, a lovely, sweet guy at heart. He just had no fear. That was all of them, though. No fear.

DES PENNEY: We were a little lawless gang. A gang of outlaws. Especially when we went on the road. We felt untouchable.

CLIVE LANGER: They were kids who had never been told what to do. They liked fighting and messing around and stealing things. They liked fighting each other and I could never tell if it was real or not. They'd be laughing their heads off as they smashed each other with things.

DORNEY: London Records gave us loads of money, but the album cost a fortune and took about three months. We went through a number of engineers but there was nobody at the helm.

PENNEY: I sent them to a residential studio, House In The Woods in Surrey, to keep them away from the temptations of London and to concentrate on writing. We hadn't found time to write anything new. There wasn't a method. This was the easiest way: to get everyone in one place and come up with new songs and a formula for the future.

DORNEY: "Weekender" came out of hours of jamming.

PENNEY: Everybody's influence and inspirations all came out in one go. Joe had a guitar riff and Liam came up with the *"Weekender, go out, have a good time"* refrain. Most songs came from jams and this was the same. But because we had more time it was allowed to manifest. Maybe that's why it became such a monster.

DORNEY: We went in with Clive Langer to record a version of "Crackerjack". While we were there

Sink sedan: Flowered Up in 1992

KEY PLAYERS

Des Penney Manager

Tim Dorney Keyboards

Jeff Barrett Heavenly records

Andrew "Wiz" Whiston Director

Clive Langer Producer

Anna Haigh Actor

we ended up doing a 20-minute version of "Weekender". Clive said we should record that. We had a rehearsal room underneath a pub in Camden. We had an arrangement on the Atari with the various bits roughly programmed, but Clive came down and we spent about three days arranging it properly.

LANGER: I decided I had to get into the whole vibe of the track and took a snippet of a pill every night while we were doing it. The session was like a journey. I wasn't into the rave scene but it was easy to understand – it's all pop music. It's universal and it's an anthem. I felt engulfed by it. I'd go to clubs or they'd take you to pubs on estates that were half gangsters, half kids on drugs. It was like stepping into a film. For a couple of months I was inside their world.

PENNEY: All the parts were there. Clive made it more fluid. He gave it the structure.

DORNEY: We had fantastic session heads playing on it. We had Steve Nieve from the Attractions. He played the organ. We paid him three Es. Kate St John from Dream Academy plays the oboe. Luis Jardim, who did all Trevor Horn's stuff, does the percussion. Claudia Fontaine did the backing vocals. Don Weller, who played on "Absolute Beginners", was on sax. We had a good week of these people coming in. Then we had three days mixing with Mark Stent, one of the world's greatest mixers.

> **"They'd take you to pubs on estates that were half gangsters, half kids on drugs. It was like stepping into a film"** CLIVE LANGER

LANGER: My reason to be there was to make each bit as interesting as it could be. It's a visual recording. In each section you are in different clubs in different spaces.

BARRETT: I remember Des telling me they were on to something and going over to Clive's studio and him playing it to me. They had this mind-boggling 12-minute tune. London didn't know what to do with it. They didn't see it like we did, as a masterpiece, they wanted to edit it for radio. We stepped in. Hats off to London for putting them in the studio with somebody who got them, but Roger Ames at London has never forgiven me.

ANDREW "WIZ" WHISTON: I knew Des and Liam from going out in various clubs in London. They were flamboyant personalities.

BARRETT: I suggested we make a film. I said it was a statement track so let's treat it like that. We had always seen it in visual terms. If you grew up with Alan Sillitoe and *Quadrophenia*, you got it.

WIZ: Jeff is very insightful. He could tell I was wanting to use my burgeoning skill and participation in the scene. There was something in me that needed to come out and Jeff was very good at recognising that.

BARRETT: One night after a party, I was waiting for a taxi and Wiz pulled up. That was fantastically fortuitous because I had an acetate and I played it to him in a dark room in my flat in Shepherd's Bush.

WIZ: It's no exaggeration that as I heard the song the first time, everything was falling into place. The previous two or three years going out, there had always been a part of my brain looking for clues and taking notes – I had a notebook in one pocket and my pills in the other. I almost had a sense of anxiety as I knew what was happening around us would dissolve and evolve and be co-opted and diluted. Right then, it was a revolutionary situation and a whole shift of consciousness had taken place.

ANNA HAIGH: The rest of us were weekenders, living in the moment, whereas Wiz was able to step outside that and observe it while it still happened. Most people do that retrospectively, but he was able to do that while being in the middle of it.

WIZ: Hearing the acetate, it was a godamn fucking soundtrack with all these tempo changes and different moods. There were punk rock verses, an existential, exasperated chorus and these very hallucinogenic sections which culminated with an extraordinary climax. The lyrics spoke to me as loudly as the music. Liam and Des had written the first song that cast a critical eye on the hedonism, asking how real and sincere and how much of a pose it was. ➤

Flowered Up with Anna Haigh (second left) and Lee Whitlock (centre)

HAIGH: I used to sing with Bocca Juniors, which was Andrew Weatherall and Terry Farley's band. Through that I ended up singing with Flowered Up on their album. Wiz had directed the video for Bocca Junior's "Raise", so saw me as the obvious co-star for "Weekender". He gave me the storyboard. I still have it somewhere.

DORNEY: He had this thing that looked like a graph, a squiggly line, that traced the excitement and mood levels against time. He had it all mapped out, where the impact moments would be, where he could slow it down. It has the highs and lows there, the whole scene. It has both ends of the spectrum.

WIZ: I wrote the main character with Liam in mind. He was a charismatic, powerful personality. He had a Joe Strummer quality. As the production got going and it was clear this was going to be something special, he had the respect to call me and say he couldn't do it. I thought it was all over. But Lee [*Whitlock*] came in and got it in five seconds. If we'd gone ahead with Liam, we'd still be shooting now.

BARRETT: Wiz did an incredible job. There were some amazing shots, great ideas and the camera work was good. It was like French New Wave.

HAIGH: My interpretation was that Liam was referring to people who hate their jobs and life but went out at the weekend to be what they aspired to be, "something special". I feel that he felt disgusted by the insincerity of their lives and was telling them to 'be real'. In the film, Lee has a moment of realisation after leaving the club, seeing the cold light of day after a night of false fantasy. He is left questioning his life and the whole of existence.

WIZ: There was a *Quadrophenia* aspect to the film, which was inevitable as there's a sample from the film on the record. But for me a much more vivid touchstone was *Saturday Night Fever*. There was also *Do The Right Thing*, *My Own Private Idaho* and *Meantime*, the Mike Leigh film. They were spiritual references.

HAIGH: My first scene was the love scene. I was wearing this flesh-coloured leotard and was so nervous I needed a little shot of something. The club scene was so much fun, people were properly partying. But Wiz had it totally under control and captured everything beautifully.

WIZ: As well as wanting to galvanise the revolutionary spirit and to meet the misinformation in the media, it was also championing the Icarus myth. My interpretation of the film is the Icarus paradox – you need to be courageous and fly high, it's part of initiation, but if you are not careful you will crash. What we are after is that very fine line of transcendence, not oblivion.

DORNEY: People see parallels with their own lives. At a screening in Soho, a journalist walked out because he said it was too close to his life, he couldn't take it.

WIZ: It was ahead of its time. Some of the film is audacious, nobody knew how to promote it. But to a large degree the audience were not in the frame of mind to appreciate it. That's not to say people didn't love it. People are always coming up to me saying they put it on before they went out and when they came home. The opening scene with Lee in the window cleaner cradle is one of the greatest of a British film of the 1990s.

HAIGH: It was completely different to anything out there at the time. It was documenting what was happening. It was a seminal piece of art in pop culture.

BARRETT: There was no precedent of a 15-minute video for an indie single that was 12 minutes long. This was a statement. We were saying that if you believed in this group, here was your pay-off for all the flak you'd taken – the record you wanted them to make.

PENNEY: The launch party was bananas. It was at this tacky £3m mansion down a private lane in Blackheath. The tacky mansion soon became the shell of a tacky mansion. It was wild. We lived there for a week and sold 1,000 tickets. It went mad.

WIZ: One could certainly interpret the song as a cry for anarchist principles, challenging the work ethic and favouring a communal experience.

DORNEY: I love Liam, but post-"Weekender" the drugs were starting to kick in. He lost a lot of confidence, and it was hard to get him on stage. He wasn't inspired to write. The lyrics he did come up with were very negative.

PENNEY: Everybody was fed up of each other's antics. They were getting too crazy.

BARRETT: It was really sad because we'd fucking done it, we'd pulled them back from obscurity, ridicule even. It was a foundation. But Liam had lost his way. It fizzled and was gone.

WIZ: The brothers died and that's tragic and inescapable. But that's not actually what Flowered Up were about.

DORNEY: There are two songs I'm known for – "Ready To Go" by Republica and "Weekender". I take "Ready To Go" for the success, but "Weekender" for the kudos.

PENNEY: It's the best statement we've got of that period. It's so realistic because it's from people who were living that lifestyle. It was natural, it came from the people who were in and around that scene and were charting what happened. None of it was forced. None of it was contrived.

Weekender is issued by the BFI on June 19 accompanied by a new 52-minute documentary, I Am Weekender

FACT FILE

Weekender Flowered Up
Label Heavenly
Producer Clive Langer
Recorded at Westside, Ladbroke Grove
Released April 1992
UK 20; **US** –

Written by: Flowered Up.
Personnel: Liam Maher (vocals), Joe Maher (guitar), Tim Dorney (keyboards), Andrew Jackson (bass), John Tuvey (drums), Chris Ballin (backing vocals), Claudia Fontaine (backing vocals), Steve Nieve (Hammond), Kate St John (oboe), Don Weller (sax), Luis Jardim (percussion)

TIME LINE

1989 Flowered Up form on an estate in Camden, inspired by ecstasy and rock'n'roll. Release two singles on Heavenly before signing for London records.
Summer 1991 After releasing their debut album, Flowered Up head to The House In The Woods, a residential studio in Surrey, where "Weekender" emerges from a jam.
Winter 1991 Clive Langer produces the single after first hearing the band play "Weekender" at the end of a recording session. Jeff Barrett of Heavenly suggests that director Andrew "Wiz" Whiston makes an accompanying short film.
April 1992 "Weekender" is released and eventually reaches No 20 in the charts. Despite its success, Flowered Up split up soon after.
2009 Liam Maher dies of a heroin overdose after a brief reunion in 2005.
2023 *I Am Weekender* documentary is released to celebrate the song as the video is reissued by the BFI.

the sisters of mercy

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SAT 23 LONDON CAMDEN ROUNDHOUSE

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A KILIMANJARO & FRIENDS PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH PRIMARY TALENT INTERNATIONAL

Jet boys: the New York Dolls in London, November 1973 – (l–r) Jerry Nolan, Sylvain Sylvain, David Johansen, Johnny Thunders and Arthur Kane

Lipstick Traces

From mascara-clad ingénue of the **NEW YORK DOLLS** to lounge lizard Buster Poindexter, **DAVID JOHANSEN** is one of the great survivors of the early-'70s New York music scene. As his life and times are documented by the city's other great rock'n'roller, Martin Scorsese, the singer recalls high times at the heart of the Dolls' colourful and outrageous prime. "It was a very groovy scene," he tells **Peter Watts**

Photo by MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

SIPPING PG Tips from a dainty blue-and-white teacup, David Johansen considers the long, strange journey that has taken him from high-heeled frontman of the New York Dolls to bouffant nightclub act, country-blues singer and beyond. "There are certain phases in the history of New York, especially in my life," he says, "that I can look back and say, 'Yeah, *that* was really something.'"

This month, several of these glorious incarnations are celebrated in Martin Scorsese's *Personality Crisis: One Night Only* – a documentary that covers the span of Johansen's work, both before, during and after the Dolls. Speaking today over Zoom, Johansen very much inhabits the role of New York music's grandee, a veteran player who's navigated his way from downtown scenester to uptown habitué. Accompanied, off-camera, by his wife Mara, who supplies him with a steady diet of biscuits, he chooses his words carefully, rich and gravelly voiced. With his hair hanging down past his shoulders, he still cuts a distinctive, wiry figure.

Johansen's trajectory has been almost as profound as the transition made by New York itself since he first became an active participant in the city's counterculture during the late '60s. Pre-Dolls, he rubbed shoulders with the likes of Abbie Hoffman and Harry Smith in the semi-mythical avant-garde scene; post-Dolls, he performed as a solo artist, before reinventing himself as club singer Buster Poindexter, whose jump-blues repertoire of material has produced four albums ➤

Soca and sauvignon blanc: Johansen in New York City on September 22, 1987

Angelic upstarts: Johansen and Johnny Thunders on Dutch TV show *TopPop*, December 1973

and one unexpected and not entirely welcome chart hit, the calypso "Hot Hot Hot".

In Scorsese's film, Johansen appears in performance as Buster. As a character Poindexter could be restrictive, but in Johansen's hands he becomes liberating, allowing the artist to have a little more fun than being simply himself. "Yes, it is [*liberating*]," he agrees. "Of course, it's really David. David is Buster and Buster is David. The thing is, sometimes you can have a conceit. Most people do it, but they don't change their name. You have this character that is like a warrior who goes into battle for you. You don't have to censor yourself too much or whatever because it's his fault. Almost anybody who goes on stage does that."

The core of Scorsese's film is a series of shows that Johansen played at New York's Café Carlyle in January 2020, with Johansen-as-Buster performing the Johansen songbook, interspersed with new interviews filmed by his stepdaughter, Leah Hennessey. Scorsese and Johansen go way back – they both broke out in 1973, the year of *Mean Streets* and the Dolls' riotous debut album. It's a period Scorsese revisited separately in *Vinyl*, his short-lived series about a New York record label, whose debut episode included a replica Dolls gig at their regular haunt of the Mercer Arts Center.

"Scorsese is an old friend of mine," confirms Johansen. "Over the years, I have done a few projects for him. I sang songs for *Boardwalk Empire*, old-timey songs. Stuff like that. He used the first Dolls record to rile some of the guys up on the set of *Mean Streets* before they had a fight scene."

The film makes a subtle case for Johansen as representing something special about New York culture, an accessible avant-garde, one that never takes itself too seriously but isn't content to simply play the clown. There is another side to this, of course; by letting Johansen tell his marvellous story, mostly without additional talking heads, Scorsese's film implicitly reminds us that Johansen is the sole surviving New York Doll. He has outlived his bandmates Billy Murcia, Johnny Thunders, Jerry Nolan, Arthur Kane and Sylvain Sylvain; Murcia, Thunders and Nolan died unnaturally young – "Heroin destroyed everything for the Dolls," Johansen has admitted. But in some respects, Johansen bears his status as last Doll standing lightly; one of the increasingly few remaining vestiges of a vanished 1970s New York – a creative spirit far too singular to be confined. "It's not like I'm filled with trauma for the past or anything," he says.

"There was nothing happening in 1971"
DAVID JOHANSEN

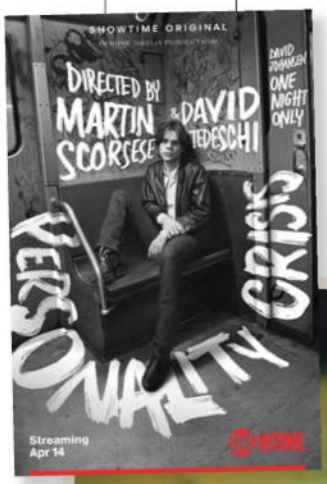
UNCUT: Scorsese has made documentaries about George Harrison, the Stones, The Band and Bob Dylan. You're in illustrious company, then.

I guess... or they are! I was doing this show at Café Carlyle, which is a fancy joint, an old place in the Carlyle Hotel in New York. We'd been on the road with the second version of the Dolls for eight, 10 years. We were going to do one show in London and ended up on the merry-go-round. That was winding down and I wanted to stay in New York for a while, re-establish friendships, things like that.

In around 2015, 2106, I decided to put a repertoire together and called it Buster because I wasn't doing songs I wrote, I was doing songs that I dug. It was a much more mature version of the original Buster – Buster at this age. We started playing the Carlyle twice a year, two weeks at a time. You could live in the hotel, which was kind of a dream because it's the schlep that kills you, you know what I'm saying? Taking the elevator to work is my dream.

What happened next?

They invited us back. I was in this mood where I didn't want to have to learn 20 new songs, because you have to do a different show each time. So I thought I'd sing songs I wrote because I knew them already. It was a big success. We wanted to keep it going and were thinking about doing a



Delivering "pre-Hays Code rock'n'roll" in Buster Poindexter guise

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS; GIJSBERT HANEKROOT/REDFERNS

theatre on Broadway. Mara called Marty to invite him to the show to give us some suggestions about where we could extend this thing. He wasn't the only person we asked, but he was, I guess, the only major industrial filmmaker. He came and then he said he wanted to shoot it. Mara's reminding me that I said no.

You said no to Martin Scorsese?
I wanted to do it on stage. I felt that if you show it on TV, that's the end of it. I was having a lot of fun and I wanted to keep it going. But eventually I acquiesced. I didn't want to be like Charley Patton. Charley Patton didn't want to make records because he was afraid everybody would steal his act.

Describe the show for people who haven't seen the film...
This act is pretty unique. It's kind of a New York-centric kind of an act. I've tried taking it out and it doesn't work as well. We set it up, we did like three nights, and he shot two of them I think. Then he and David Tedeschi started going through archives to put something together. I tell all these stories in the show – they wanted some stuff to go with that and enhance the movie. It doesn't cover everything I do, but there's a good chunk of it. When I watched it, I didn't cringe that much. That was good. Sometimes I feel like an idiot when I see what I was capable of.

How did Buster start?
Innocently enough in this little saloon in Gramercy Park called Tramps. They used to have a back room and the guy who ran Tramps, Terry Dunne, who was an Irishman, he used to bring in legendary blues singers. This was in the late '70s and '80s. He would have like Joe Turner, who would do a month and live in a room upstairs. He had Big Maybelle, Big Mama Thornton, all these amazing acts. I realised they didn't have anything on a Monday. I had all these songs that I would listen to in the van on the road to tune out my travelling companions, and at that time I was really into the jump blues thing. I used to call it the pre-Hays Code rock'n'roll. I made a little show, a piano player, a guitar player. Just the three of us.

Anyway, this became a big success. It was a groovy scene. People would drop by when they were in town. It did a lot for my voice. It meant I could tell jokes. I was free, I didn't have to do anything I didn't want to. When I did the Johansen thing – and I think about this after the fact – I came to resent it, this side of me with no shadows. Buster is more integrated.

Was there a danger of losing that freedom after breaking out of Tramps?
I did lose it. I was down in Tortola or something and that Arrows song "Hot Hot Hot" was playing all the time on the radio. That period of soca, late '70s and early '80s, I loved and I still love. We started doing that song and people liked it, I liked it, but when we recorded it that was the end. Oh my God, don't tell me I have to keep doing this? So that was that, and I went on to do the Harry Smiths to free myself.

Going back to '73, was there an overlap between *Mean Streets* and the world of the New York Dolls?
If you played that film in Duluth, people would be, "Oh, my God. What is this?" but when you grew up in it, it wasn't anything. It was just what it was. I remember the first time I saw the movie. Syl and I were walking down the street and there used to be this arty cinema over on 5th Avenue just south of 14th Street, and we thought let's go inside and cool off. The movie had already started and at first I thought it was a documentary. I realised after a while it was a movie of course, when I heard the music. Scorsese plays his music loud in his movies. We had a mutual appreciation. There are a lot of artists in New York who have a lot of respect for each other and can kind of joke around with each other.

Martin Scorsese at a screening of *Personality Crisis* at the New York Film Festival, 2022

"IT BECAME A BIG SCANDAL"

When Malcolm McLaren made Dolls fans see red

THE most memorable moment of Malcolm McLaren's brief period managing the New York Dolls came in early 1975. Johansen takes up the story. "Syl and I had written this song, 'Red Patent Leather', so we got costumes that were made of red leather and Malcolm volunteered to facilitate that. Then we went wild."

Johansen and McLaren decided to use the Communist hammer and sickle flag as the new backdrop. For the band, it was a pun – not the Communist Party as much as a party for Communists – but the new look did not go down well, even among the hipsters in the NYC counterculture. Sylvain once recalled being told by a journalist, "'Syl, you guys tried the fag thing, you tried the crazy guitar thing, and now you're gonna go Communist... That's it, that's the end of your career.'"

So it proved. "It became a big scandal," says Johansen. "I was shocked that people were so taken aback by our seeming approval of Joe Stalin. It was quite scandalous and really made me think, especially about certain people I thought were friends. The whole thing was a joke anyway."

Sickle and tired: the Dolls in 1977

Pre-Dolls, the film picks up that overlap between the hippies and punk.
New York hippies had a lot of punk attitude. They didn't have much patience for things. It was different to the West Coast. It's greedier in New York. The Fillmore East was such an insane place. Gangs would take it over and demand certain things from Bill Graham. I remember scenes that went down there that were so crazy. It was very animated.

Debbie Harry is in the audience at the Carlyle. When did you realise the influence the Dolls had on the bands that followed?
Never. I don't take any hubristic pride in any of that. I hear it from other people but it just goes through me. There was nothing happening in 1971, early '72. There was no place to play. The scene was still happening on the street. We, the band, sort of fell together and started looking for places we could play. They had these draconian laws that went down in the late '60s. When I was a kid, MacDougall Street was heavenly, there were so many clubs and great bands playing. Then they passed these Cabaret Laws, and all those places closed. It was like a ghost town. We had an ambition to get something going again, which I guess we did. It was ➤

ROBERTABAYLEY/REDFERNS;ARTUROHOLMES/GETTYIMAGESFORFLC

The chic of it: the Dolls and dinner for £2.50 at Biba's Rainbow Room restaurant, Kensington, November 26, 1973

like having to go to the forest to chop down all the trees to build the stage and put up signs around town – we had to create things.

How did you get that break?
I knew this guy, Eric Emerson, who was in a band called The Magic Tramps. He was an Andy Warhol movie star and he used to wear lederhosen and do the cha-cha dance. They had a gypsy violin player. It wasn't a straight rock'n' roll band, it was a Turkish rock'n' roll band. He said he was playing at this place called Mercer Arts Centre, did we want to play with them? We started playing Tuesday nights at midnight. We started doing that on Tuesday nights and this scene grew up, a very groovy scene. I think about that very fondly but I don't think of it as influencing other people.

When did things click for you, in the earliest days of the New York Dolls?
When Syl came in and he was bouncing around. He had a guitar case – I said, "Can you play that thing?" and he started playing with us and I just thought, 'We gotta have this guy in the band.' He was very energetic. He was the right size! The guy we had before that wasn't really blowing my skirt up, so to speak. We used to rehearse in this old bicycle store that rented old bicycles for people to go riding in Central Park. So in the wintertime, when there was no bicycle-rental going on, this guy Rusty set up a couple of broken-down amps and some drums so he could rent it out as a rehearsal space.

JULIAN BROWN/MIRRORPIX/GETTY IMAGES; ROBERTA BAYLEY/REDFERNS

Syl was a good size for John [*Thunders*], so that was one aspect of it. His personality was another aspect of it. His playing was great. And he was really funny – congenial, y'know? He looked like he would fit in, but it wasn't like we were going to rehearse in drag.

When did that happen, then?
Well, it was before we became a band. We noticed each other because of how we dressed. If you saw somebody down the street dressed like that you knew it was cool. It wasn't like we all got together and had a meeting about it. There was a lot of that going on St Mark's and 2nd.

It must have taken guts to dress like that?
Maybe in certain neighbourhoods, but it was just another part of the scene. There was a lot of innovation going on, you know, there was fashion, film, art, poetry. There wasn't a lot going on in terms of music, so we became the music part of that scene.

> *"I co-wrote 'Trash' with Syl, so they tell me!"*
> **DAVID JOHANSEN**

How did you write songs?
I co-wrote "Trash" with Syl, so they tell me! I don't remember exactly but I always had a notebook so I could write things down, little tidbits. So I had this idea for "Trash" and he started playing this thing: 'dang-adang-agang, dang-adang-adang, ding-ding-ding-ding waah!' I thought, 'Oh that would fit this idea', it was one of those deals. Usually the first time we play something it's just about getting ideas and then I'll go home and write the words. That's how it worked then, anyway. Syl and I have done a lot of different techniques over the years. Since the reunion, we wrote a lot of songs together, it was a very creative time. Just tickling each other, laughing a lot. We were very tuned into each other as far as writing was concerned – as far as everything was concerned. There was very rarely disagreements about songs.

How critical to the band was Sylvain?
If you took Syl out of that equation, I don't think it would have been very good, because Syl could really play. He and John went back – of course Billy and him were childhood friends. To play with John... because I always say John was like Sam Andrew in Big Brother & The Holding Company, he would just *go*. He wasn't thinking about fitting in with other players. But Syl knew exactly how to get under this guy

Joan Jett, Debbie Harry, David Johansen, and Joey Ramone at a shoot for *Punk* magazine, NYC, 1977

Sylvain Sylvain and Johansen reunite for Morrissey's Meltdown, London, June 16, 2004

and support his mania, so to speak. It was a natural thing, it just kinda clicked. I don't know if anybody else could have done that, or would have been willing to put up with us.

Malcolm McLaren managed the Dolls towards the end but there's no mention of him in the film – is there a reason for that?
There's no particular reason. We used to get clothes from him. Syl was friends with him from being in the rag trade, they had that in common. We used to go to these events, they were called Trunk Shows. There was this hotel on 34th St called the McAlpin and there would be certain times of the year when people who had clothes shops would rent all the rooms. Towards the end we'd go and peruse the merchandise and you could get it for a nice price. That's when I met Malcolm.

What did you make of him?
I liked him. I thought he was smart. He was political. He checked a lot of boxes for me. We'd go and see him in London. He had his store and on Saturdays these Teds would come down from Glasgow to buy brothel creepers. One time we were in there and the Teds were totally intimidated by the Dolls. We were using all kinds of language and dressed up. Malcolm was in shock because he was scared of the Teds.

That's one end of the Dolls' story. But at the other was your unexpected reunion for the 2004 Meltdown festival. How was it, getting the band back together?
I'd done a lot of gigs. I'd done the Harry Smiths and then I was in a band with Hubert Sumlin who played guitar for Howlin' Wolf. We had Jimmy Vivino on guitar and Levon [*Helm*] was the drummer. So I was already active when we got back together. I was probably conscious of easing any of their jitters. But you know, we threw that together pretty quick. We rehearsed for three days in New York and then went to London to put on that show. And then it took off. It was fun for a long time but it got tiring. We had to travel pretty rough most of the time, we didn't have this luxurious lifestyle for gentlemen of a certain age.

Malcolm McLaren: "smart", "political"

By default, you and Sylvain became the custodians of the Dolls' legacy until his death. Beyond the band, what connected you both?
People loved Syl – he was a really sweet guy, really jovial, and he could get along with anybody. He would say things out of the blue that would be really mindblowing. The way he described things was so beautiful. After the Dolls, when he was still living in New York, he'd be in these living situations... You'd go over to his apartment and it would be like a sitcom – there'd be kids crawling around on the floor, there'd be a monkey loose, people cooking and talking loud, the radio would be on really loud. It was a really fun thing. He knew a million people, he got along with everybody and his take on rock'n'roll was perfect.

Do you think about being the last Doll standing?
I never think of myself unless somebody like you mentions it or I read it somewhere. I don't really like to think about it too much. It's just the early band was so long ago, and a lot of the stuff that Johnny and Jerry were involved in was post-Dolls, but in the collective consciousness it sort of melds together. I wasn't really observing them in that capacity after they left the Dolls and their quest for whatever it was they were looking for.

Following the release of the film, are you planning to do more Buster shows?
I don't know what happens next. I like to paint. I like to sing. We are going to put out a record of the movie soundtrack. I am thinking of other songs I can record. I'm really good with a deadline. If I need 10 songs by next week, I can do that. So we'll see what happens.

Personality Crisis: One Night Only is streaming on Showtime

TABATHA FIREMAN/REDFERNS; ILPOMUSTO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

DJ SELECTER

A buyers' guide to David Johansen

NEW YORK DOLLS
NEW YORK DOLLS
MERCURY, 1973
The Dolls' Todd Rundgren-produced debut is like MC5's *Back In The USA* meets The Rolling Stones, with Johansen writing or co-writing every track bar one cover. Teenage alienation, identity, flamboyance, sex and violence feature heavily. Several of these songs feature in *Personality Crisis: One Night Only*, including classics "Trash" and, of course, "Personality Crisis". Under-rated follow-up *Too Much Too Soon* has too many covers but remains essential.

DAVID JOHANSEN
DAVID JOHANSEN
BLUE SKY RECORDS, 1978
Johansen had always sung with his tongue partly in cheek, and his debut album opened with a prime example, "Funky But Chic", a Sylvain Sylvain co-write that rocks a disco strut. Cleaner and tighter than his work with the Dolls, it's a fine recording – still glammy rock but with a move towards more mature moments such as "Frenchette", which he revives successfully during his show at the Carlyle.

BUSTER POINDEXTER
BUSTER POINDEXTER
RCA VICTOR, 1987
Johansen recorded four albums as Buster Poindexter, including one themed around alcohol and another around parties. These presented another example of Johansen's general approach to performing, taking something silly but playing it straight as he performs jump blues like "Smack Dab In The Middle". There's also a solid take on "House Of The Rising Sun" and a cover of his own "Heart Of Gold", which originally appeared on Johansen's 1981 album *Here Comes The Night* and is performed on *Personality Crisis*.

DAVID JOHANSEN AND THE HARRY SMITHS
DAVID JOHANSEN AND THE HARRY SMITHS CHESKY RECORDS, 2000
One of two albums Johansen recorded with The Harry Smiths, the LP sees Johansen tackling classic blues with a band that included long-time collaborator Brian Koonin. Features songs by Mississippi John Hurt and Lightnin' Hopkins as well as traditionals "Delia", "Poor Boy Blues" and "Oh Death". Like Buster Poindexter, the set was honed on stage before being taken to the studio, but it's a fundamentally more serious undertaking, with Johansen demonstrating the gravitas to pull it off.

NEW YORK DOLLS
CAUSE I SEZ SO
ATCO, 2009
The Dolls' second post-reformation album was – like the '73 debut – produced by Todd Rundgren. By now the original members were reduced to Johansen and Sylvain, but the pair collaborate effectively on a series of reflective and introspective numbers, such as the tumbling neo-gothic "Temptation To Exist", which is beautifully recreated during the *Personality Crisis* set at the Carlyle.

De La Soul

Original D.A.I.S.Y Age hero Pos traces the recorded story of his hip-hop pioneers

WHEN they formed in Long Island in 1988, De La Soul represented something of a paradigm shift in hip-hop. Their debut album, *3 Feet High And Rising*, was a riot of bright, primary colours, 'Daisy Age' optimism, lyrics that explicitly pushed against hip-hop's incipient gangster tendencies and whimsical samples from every area of pop history. It's why the recent death of senior member David Jolicoeur – aka Trugoy The Dove, or Plug Two – prompted so much reflection from fans around the world.

"I'm still in shock about Dave," says co-frontman and high school friend Kelvin Mercer (aka Pos, Posdnuos or Plug One). "We knew he had heart problems – that was evident when we toured with Gorillaz – but no-one saw this coming. I've done a lot of mourning since his death and eventually your heart gets lighter. Dave lived a life of joy, and he brought so much joy to the world. When we started out, we'd have been happy if our records had just been played by a few New York DJs. The fact that we made it all over the world is amazing to us. Dave touched so many people, and his life was not in vain."

De La Soul's recent Royal Albert Hall gig turned into a wake for Jolicoeur. "I loved the energy and the beauty of that show," says Pos. "It was therapeutic for us and the audience alike. But me and [*fellow founding member*] Maseo will still be playing live and recording, keeping the spirit alive." With the band's catalogue now live across streaming services, Pos looks back across their nine albums, from Daisy Age upstarts to respected elders. ***JOHN LEWIS***

Going places: (l-r) Vincent "Maseo" Mason, David Jude "Trugoy the Dove" Jolicoeur and Kelvin "Posdnuos" Mercer circa 1990

3 FEET HIGH AND RISING

TOMMY BOY, 1989

The birth of the Daisy Age – a neo-psychedelic slice of hippy hop that recontextualised dozens of unlikely samples, from Liberace to Steely Dan

UNCUT CLASSIC

A lot of that album comes from the blend of influences in the band. Dave's family were from Haiti and listened to salsa and country and all sorts; mine were from the south and liked doo-wop, soul, jazz. Black radio stations played all kinds of music as well as R&B – The Beatles, Steely Dan, Chicago, Kraftwerk, Bob Marley. In New York we had Frankie Crocker on WBLS, who'd play soul, rock, reggae and new wave. So all that fed into our music.

We recorded it at Calliope in the Garment District, the home of the Native Tongues bands in New York – us, A Tribe Called Quest, Jungle Brothers, Monie Love, Queen Latifah. Our producer Prince Paul had recorded there with Stetsasonic. He was very disciplined and focused about us writing lyrics. He would also demand ideas, which is why the album buzzes with themes. There was the concept about us transmitting from Mars and there was the spoof quiz show – but there were more serious moments. "Say No Go" was about drug addiction – the opening lyric is about babies born to addicted mothers. "Stonewashed denim" is a metaphor for people being constantly stoned. I wanted to sample Daryl Hall singing "*I can't go for that*" but Paul was keen to find other samples that fitted with that, like The Turtles or The Detroit Emeralds.

But Paul was also great at capturing our natural silliness. We'd start mouthing some inane lyrics and he'd get us to record them in the vocal booth. Dave would be doodling on the piano and Paul would secretly put the mics on and use bits of it in a song. For "De La Orgee" we joked about making orgasmic moaning sounds, and Paul said, "Yes! Do it!", so a load of us went into the vocal booth and started doing that. We were like bulls in a china shop, knocking stuff down.

I love that this album made by a bunch of teenagers, making a beautiful mess, is now regarded as some kind of classic. It's in the National Registry of Recordings at the Library Of Congress! I think what hit a chord is that it was for everybody. Nobody was excluded from *3 Feet High And Rising*.

DE LA SOUL IS DEAD

TOMMY BOY/WARNER BROS, 1991

The Daisy Age's demise is represented by a smashed flowerpot for this equally whimsical sophomore classic

The title came after months of touring the first album – press conferences, interviews, live dates, TV, radio interviews, and so on. It was burning us out. In our manager's office there was a whiteboard listing all the dates that us and the other artists on his roster had to do, taking up the next six months. It was so overwhelming that Dave went up with a board eraser, rubbed out our dates, and wrote "De La Soul Is Dead" on the board! Then Mase said, "Man, that should be the title of our next album."

A lot of people say it was darker than the debut, but I'm not sure. The humour, the silliness, the skits, were still there. "Ring Ring Ring" and "A Rollerskating Jam Named Saturdays" were joyful. You've got samples of everything from The Doors to Genesis and Tom Waits. Even the theme of death isn't bleak – it's more about transitioning to another plane, metamorphosing into something else. However, I think it's more laser focused than the first album. Instead of allowing Prince Paul's energy to control the room and encourage us to be constantly zany, we mix it up. "Afro Connections At H i 5" is us getting a bit more "street", a bit more serious, like a blaxploitation movie. "Millie Pulled A Pistol On Santa" is based on a real story. "My Brother's A Basehead" is partly autobiographical – my older brother was a crack addict. Thankfully, he's been in recovery and he's in a good place now. But that was me dealing with some difficult stuff.

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

On the corner: De La Soul release grittier fourth LP *Stakes Is High*, 1996

BUHLOONE MINDSTATE

TOMMY BOY/WARNER BROS, 1993

Moving in a jazz and funk direction, with James Brown's horn section

The title means having the elevated mind state of a "buhloone", or balloon. We might blow up but we won't go pop, or in other words, we're popular but not trying to make pop music. Hanging out with Q-Tip got me deeper into jazz and funk. We were also inspired by that Brand New Heavies album featuring guest rappers [*The Heavy Rhyme Experience Vol 1*]. We loved James Brown's horn section – Maceo Parker on alto, Pee Wee Ellis on tenor, Fred Wesley on trombone – so we thought, 'Why not ask them to guest with us?' To our surprise, they were keen. It was really inspiring to see them record – they'd hang out, chat, laugh, have fun, they'd sing ideas and jam. It was amazing to see that. This is the first album where the live musicians started to become as important as the samples, and they affected the samples – Lou Rawls, Eddie Harris, Lou Donaldson, Lonnie Smith and so on.

"I Am I Be" was an autobiographical lyric – Hattie Mae was my mother who had recently passed away, and I was talking about that, and the tragedy that she never got to meet my children. She, like my father, was from the South. Growing up in New York, my parents worked hard and never took holidays. They'd just send us to relatives in North Carolina for the summer!

A lot of people hated this album when it came out, but a lot of those same people stuck with it and now say it's their favourite De La Soul album. It's a grower!

STAKES IS HIGH

TOMMY BOY/WARNER BROS, 1996

The band's first album without producer Prince Paul, dissing the nihilism of gangster rap

This was the first album where the title came before any recording sessions. *Buhloone Mindstate* hadn't done too well; we toured with Tribe and The Pharcyde and got sick. I ended up in hospital with spinal meningitis, while the single release for "I Am I Be" was cancelled because I couldn't film a video. Our manager said to us, "Your popularity is on the slide, you need to tighten your belts." Dave's cousin heard this and said, "Man, for this next album, stakes is high." So this became our mission statement. It needed to get serious, bleaker, less comedic. We spent some time working on ideas at Paul's crib, but we decided that his ideas weren't on the path of that mission statement. He was in the middle of doing stuff with Gravediggaz, so we decided to open things up and work with outside producers. Jay D was already in the picture, Q-Tip was a friend, there was a Slum Village demo that was floating around, so all those influences fed into the album. As it happens, 90 per cent of the album was produced by us, Dave mainly. The rapper Mos Def was a big influence – he'd struck up a friendship with Mase. He made me dig deep into rhyming.

Some people thought that "Baby Baby Baby Baby Ooh Baby" was a pisstake of Puff Daddy. It kinda was, but it was acknowledging that someone like Puff could make something magical over a very simple loop. It didn't have to be intricate and complex.

ART OFFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: MOSAIC THUMP

TOMMY BOY, 2000

The start of a trilogy: laden with special guests, from Chaka Khan to the Beasties, and from Busta Rhymes to Redman

The idea was to do a triple album. Tom Silverman at Tommy Boy said, "Yes, that's a great idea, but why not split it up into three separate releases? That way you'd get a separate budget for each one." The title of this projected trilogy was, obviously, a pun on artificial intelligence, which has become quite a big deal now.

I think, looking back, we might have gone overboard with the guest slots! But we loved them. Chaka Khan was amazing. We had a track that was supposed to be with Outkast and Goodie Mob, but they couldn't make it. We thought a great soul voice would fit well, so we approached Chaka, not thinking she'd agree. It was like having a goddess in the studio! She was very cool but a little nervous. We were lucky to have her engineer working on the sessions. She'd do a take and we'd think it was amazing, but her engineer would say, "Yeah, she can do it even better than that." So he got us to push her. The song was going to be called "All Good", about things being great, but Chaka thought it would be more interesting if we said that it ain't all great. Which is why the title now has a question mark ➤

RESERVOIRMEDIA

"Using different guests as instruments": the trio in 2016

after it. We invited all three Beastie Boys for "Squat!" – Ad Rock and Mike D made it, but MCA didn't. We were a little bummed about that, but I think he was already having issues with his throat glands – the cancer that eventually killed him.

AOI: BIONIX

TOMMY BOY, 2001

Taking it to church with a heavy gospel session

We got to know Dave West through A Tribe Called Quest; he was already part of our production team on the first AOI album. He came up through the church – he was a drummer and a beat producer, and he had access to some great gospel musicians who feature on this album. The linking device was these little skits featuring a character called the Reverend Do Good, who was played by Troy Hightower. You won't believe the effort that went into recording those skits! We had to recreate a church congregation by multi-tracking 10 voices in a booth and making it sound like 100 people. We soundscaped him walking out of the church, so you had birdsong and footsteps and passing traffic. It was like scoring a movie! There's a track where the Reverend smokes some weed and then the skit segues into "Peer Pressure", produced by J Dilla, which is like a sonic drug experience. I've never actually smoked weed, but I get that.

Again, there are lots of great and unlikely samples. Paul McCartney's "Wonderful Christmastime" features on "Simply". There's some jazz vibraphone from Cal Tjader on "Watch Out". A track I produced, "Held Down", featuring Cee Lo Green, has a sample from Serge Gainsbourg's *Melody Nelson*. I only found out about Serge while we were promoting *3 Feet High And Rising* in Paris, and a French journalist said we reminded him of Serge. Next time we saw that journalist he brought us a bunch of Serge CDs. He's a genius. I got a bunch of samples from his albums.

THE GRIND DATE

AOI/SANCTUARY URBAN, 2004

Ditching the skits for old-school rhyming on De La Soul's first post-Tommy Boy release

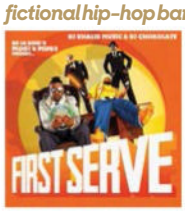
This was going to be the third part of our AOI trilogy, but Tommy Boy records folded and there was no way we could get another label to pick that up as their first recording with us. So we had to go another route. Until this point, all our albums had featured comic sketches, and we had even recorded some Reverend Do Good skits for this album, but Dave [*West*] suggested we ditch them. So this was our beats and rhymes album. We had a lot of guests – Yummy Bingham, Common, Ghostface Killah, DJ Premier, Flava Flav, MF Doom and others. It's very old-school hip-hop, but I guess there aren't many old-school hip-hop albums where people are spitting rhymes over samples of Yes, Mountain and Rick Wakeman!

This was our last album with J Dilla, who produced "Verbal Clap" and "Much More". He worked on four of our albums in total, going back to *Stakes Is High*. What a guy. Talent literally fell out of him, like opening a faucet. I'm not exaggerating. He could sit in a studio, load up a bunch of sounds, play them to me and say, "You like this?" He was always genuinely surprised when we'd say, yeah, that's amazing. That man had something godly within him. He could hear things no-one else could. I used to think that he was like a machine, but that's not quite right – it was more that he had this amazing organic soul, one that was in complete cohesion with the rhythms.

PLUG 1 & PLUG 2 PRESENT... FIRST SERVE

DUCK DOWN MUSIC/PIAS, 2012

Not strictly a De La Soul album: Posdnuos and Trugoy team up with two French producers to present a fictional hip-hop band



We were working with The Roots in France and met the promoter Mike Carsenti, who introduced us to two great French DJs, Khalid and Chokolate. They had a whole project lined up for two rappers – they were DJ-ing and producing, so they didn't really need Maseo, who is primarily a producer and DJ for us. And Mase was cool with that. They had studio time and a label budget, so we met in Paris and talked about a storyline. There was a lot of discussion, a lot of teamwork, it was a very collaborative project. The conceit is that First Serve are not De La Soul, they are two up-and-coming rappers – I'm Jacob Barrow and Dave was Deen Witter. I guess it was very reminiscent of Prince Paul's *Prince Among Thieves* – which we featured on – but we took it a bit further, conceptually.

We always loved working in France, going back to our early press trips to Paris. We actually knocked this album out pretty quick – I think we were in a studio for only about two weeks, joined by the occasional female voices. Then Khalid and Chokolate worked on it after we'd finished – me and Dave had rapped over samples, but to save money on sample clearance they got in an actual band and recreated a lot of the samples using live musicians. So it ended up as one of those Brand New Heavies-style live rap projects, a bit like *Buhloone Mindstate*. It was very different to our other albums, but it stands up well.

AND THE ANONYMOUS NOBODY...

AOI/KOBALT, 2016

Kickstarter-funded swansong featuring Damon Albarn, David Byrne, Jill Scott, Snoop Dogg, Justin Hawkins, Uncle Tom Cobley and all

We didn't necessarily need to crowdfund this, but signing to a label means you lose control. Labels have expectations, and they might not have liked our unconventional arrangements. On a track like "Drawn", Little Dragon sings nearly everything and we barely rhyme until four minutes in. Likewise, we'd start a track like "Snoopies" and say, man, this really sounds like Talking Heads, so we'd ask David Byrne to sing on it. Likewise we'd start "Greyhounds" and realise that Usher would be perfect for it.

Some people were surprised to see us working with the likes of 2Chainz and Snoop. "How can you work with them, ain't you the anti-gangster guys?" But it's fans who think like that, never musicians. We've often toured with so-called gangster rappers and there's a lot of respect between us. What it's about is sonic marriage. De La Soul was always about marrying the right version of me with the right version of Dave, and we do the same with every collaboratiown.

We started working with Damon Albarn in 2004, on "Feel Good Inc", and appeared on several Gorillaz albums. That definitely inspired our approach of using different guests as instruments. We enjoyed working with live musicians and jamming in the studio, like a Roots or Brand New Heavies project, but it doesn't sound live. We chopped up the live performances, slowed them down, sped them up, like we were working with samples.

Kickstarter gives you a lot of freedom. We had some very generous big-money donors, like the comedian Russell Peters, but we were also grateful for those thousands of fans who donated a few dollars.

De La Soul's catalogue is now on streaming services, while physical reissues are available from AOI/Chrysalis

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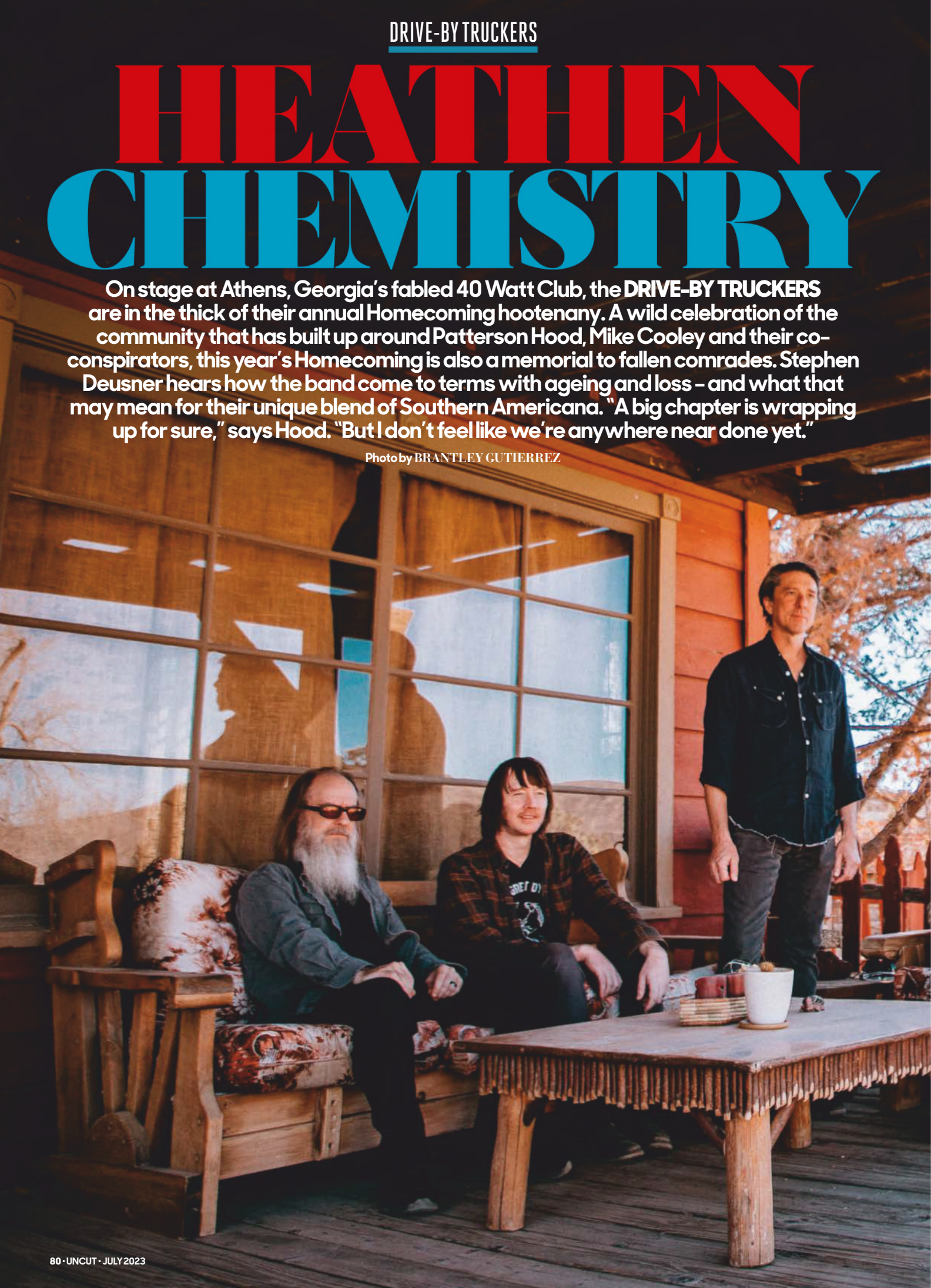
HEATHEN CHEMISTRY

On stage at Athens, Georgia's fabled 40 Watt Club, the **DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS** are in the thick of their annual Homecoming hootenany. A wild celebration of the community that has built up around Patterson Hood, Mike Cooley and their co-conspirators, this year's Homecoming is also a memorial to fallen comrades. Stephen Deusner hears how the band come to terms with ageing and loss – and what that may mean for their unique blend of Southern Americana. "A big chapter is wrapping up for sure," says Hood. "But I don't feel like we're anywhere near done yet."

Photo by BRANTLEY GUTIERREZ



Drive-By Truckers in 2023: (l-r) Brad Morgan, Matt Patton, Mike Cooley, Jay Gonzalez, Patterson Hood

Lorry lorry laughs: the Truckers on stage at the 40 Watt Club, Athens, GA

JASON THRASHER

PATTERSON Hood is angry. It's the fourth and final night of the Drive-By Truckers' triumphant series of Homecoming shows in Athens, Georgia, when a scuffle breaks out near the stage at the fabled 40 Watt Club. The band abruptly halt a particularly intense version of their new song "The Driver" and Hood lambasts the perpetrator as security hauls him to the door. "Don't bring that shit to a Drive-By Truckers show!" he yells as the five players on stage return to the final chords. "I hope this next song is your favourite song!"

The scene is made only slightly humorous by the fact that Hood is wearing a dress. A black floral-print number, in fact, with princess sleeves and a hem that falls just below the knee, showing off bare legs and a chest full of hair. All of the Truckers are dolled up tonight: Mike Cooley sports a black wrap that shows off his jogger's gams and "makes me feel pretty", he tells the crowd. Bassist Matt Patten wears a floor-length skirt, while hirsute drummer Brad Morgan looks resplendent in a lovely black cocktail dress. Off to the side is multi-instrumentalist Jay Gonzalez, in a form-fitting dress and thigh-high boots that make him look a little like Nancy Sinatra.

Welcome to HeAthens Homecoming, the Truckers' annual run of shows on their old stomping grounds. They've been throwing this particular shindig since 2005, back when Jason Isbell and Shonna Tucker were still in the band, and it attracts fans – or Heathens, as they call themselves, or sometimes Sheathens – from all over the world. For a full week, they descend on this southern college town and transform it into something like summer camp for rock fans. Anything can happen and usually does, although everybody frowns upon the kind of behaviour that stops a song and prompts a volley of profanity from the band. "Homecoming is always special for that reason," says Hood. "It's always different each year, but this one feels like a particularly good one. It's one of my favourites."

On this particular night it's not a Heathen causing trouble and provoking the wrath of Hood, but a random dude who's obviously made too many trips to the bar. "The ethos of this community is to expel that horror and violence," says Glenn Raucher, a New Yorker who is attending his fifth Homecoming. Like the band and many in the crowd, he came dressed for the occasion, sporting a black-and-white skirt like an especially stylish kilt. "We come here to escape that shit. This is an environment where you can be yourself, you can let your freak flag fly, you can dance with abandon. It's about cooperation, kindness, and a shared commitment to joy. We want to assume that people come with the best intentions until they prove otherwise. If things get out of hand, the big guy can help."

It was the fans who came up with the idea of wearing dresses tonight, and the Truckers followed suit. "We wanted to make sure it was respectful and fun and ultimately a sign of support for our brothers and sisters whose lives are being legislated out of existence," says Lucas Henderson, from Connecticut, who is attending his 14th Homecoming along with his wife Sarah. "We didn't want it to be too jokey. We didn't want anyone to see it as comic minstrelsy, and I think it's to the fans' credit – and the band's – that it didn't come off that way."

"Our fans started the whole thing," Hood laughs. "To give them their dues, they didn't hit us up about it. We heard what they were doing and thought it was awesome. We might have enjoyed it a little too much."

"ALL THESE FRIENDS ARE DROPPING DEAD"
PATTERSON HOOD

IT'S been a long, hard road to Homecoming this year. So much has happened, both good and bad, since the last time the Drive-By Truckers convened in Athens, which lends the proceedings an even greater sense of catharsis than their typical rock show. Hood and Cooley, the band's chief songwriters and mainstays, are

"Homecoming is always special": the Truckers commune with their fanbase

Georgia and the drag act: Hood dresses up for the occasion

both in their fifties. They've been playing in the Drive-By Truckers for nearly 30 years, and this particular lineup has been together for 12 years. There are, naturally, a lot more grey hairs on stage, and the showtimes aren't quite as long as usual; the three-and-a-half-hour blowouts of yore have been pared down to around three hours. There are some people missing in the audience, people who've been crucial to the band during its long career.

"We're getting to that age now," Cooley admits. "I'm annoyed to get to a point where every time you talk to your mom, it's a rundown of everybody who's died. We're a little on the early end for that, but we're musicians and musicians die younger. So we have all these musician friends who are dropping dead in their fifties instead of their sixties."

Two weeks before Homecoming, he and Hood are sitting at an Ethiopian restaurant in downtown Louisville, tearing off pieces of injera bread and scooping up tikil gomen and lentils. It's a rare day off for the band on the tour that's allowing them to warm up with a series of dates throughout the Midwest before heading down into the South. After a series of short runs and one-offs last year, this is the first time they've been able to take last year's excellent *Welcome 2 Club XIII* out for a sustained run.

Hood admits he can be restless during the downtime between load-in, soundcheck and afterparties. "I can't write songs much on tour, because there's always music playing," he says. "But I can do other kinds of writing, although I'm not doing any right now. I'm just trying to enjoy being. I'm just living in the moment."

So too is Cooley. "There's a whole lot of nothing, and I love it!" he exclaims. "It's the only time in my life that I have right now. At home there's none of that. If I'm doing nothing, somebody will put a broom in my hands. I think I've still got PTSD from that year and a half of being trapped at home. Now if I'm at home, small stuff starts driving me crazy that didn't use to drive me crazy, like the sound of dishes banging together. I start thinking, 'I can't wait to get on the road so I don't hear that sound.'"

Ever since the Truckers recorded their first songs over beer and pizza back in June 1996, they've toured hard, embarking on white-knuckle cross-country drives detailed in songs like "Hell No I Ain't Happy" and "The Driver". They've grown accustomed to organising their lives around the rock show – and as monumental as their albums may be, their true domain isn't the studio but the stage, where they remain undimmed by age or tragedy.

Margo Cilker, their opening act for most of this tour, gets to see that every night. "Their music lights up this primordial part of my brain," she says. "They've become an entity beyond a band. They're like a club. They've been at it for so long that they have developed their own mythology that's larger than they are. I love when Patterson gets up on his preacher podium and just goes off. As someone who grew up going to church, it's very cathartic for me to hear someone like him yelling about radical love."

IN Louisville, Cooley reaches for a serving of lentils as he considers a new first in the Truckers' story. "We might have reached the legacy reissue phase of our career," he laughs. "That's what happens right before they kill you. If you stay in this game long enough, you'll get a spot at the origin-story retirement home, where you keep telling the same tired-ass story about how you met Patterson over and over and over."

He's referring to a new boxset reimagining the Truckers' foundational 2004 album, *The Dirty South*. The Truckers have put off deluxe anniversary editions off for years. But this album has always haunted them. Twenty years ago, they were coming off the twin highs of *Southern Rock Opera* in 2001 and *Decoration Day* in 2003. With Jason Isbell in the band, they were accused of hoarding Alabama's great songwriters, but were hailed for offering a new and progressive portrait of the American South. For their fifth album, they collected all their hardscrabble songs about moonshiners and drug dealers, small-town criminals and the redneck sheriffs who pursue them. "Originally it was supposed to be a double album," says Hood. Their label at the time, New West Records, balked at the expense, demanding the band pare it down to a single disc.

Now they're set to reissue it as *The Complete Dirty South* and restore it to its intended glory, with a new remaster by Greg Calbi and a re-sequenced tracklist that includes several new songs: two of Hood's rural crime sagas, "Goode's Field Road" and "The Great Car Dealer War", as well as Isbell's southern soul number "TVA". It signals a new and better working relationship with their former label. "They've definitely gone the extra mile to make sure we're happy about every aspect of the boxset," says Hood. "It's like they looked at this as a chance to try to ➤

JASON THRASHER; CHRISTINE STAUDE

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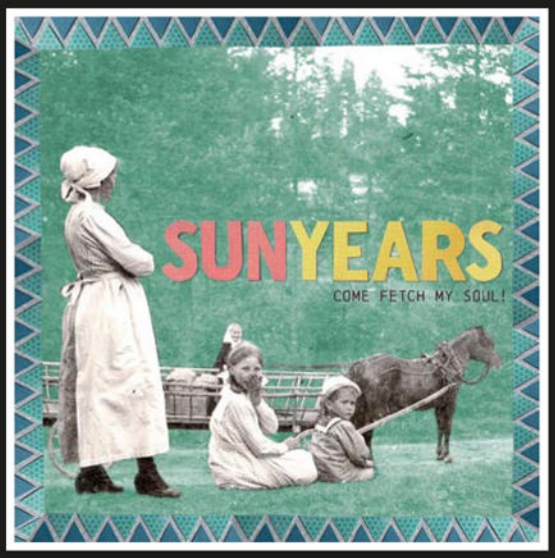


RUEN BROTHERS
TEN PACES
OUT 2 JUNE

"There's nobody else like these guys making classic, timeless, unique music at this level." - Rick Rubin

SUNYEARS
COME FETCH MY SOUL!
OUT 16 JUNE

SunYears is the new project from Peter Morén (Peter Bjorn and John) featuring Ron Sexsmith, Jess Williamson, Eric Johnson (Fruit Bats, Bonny Light Horseman), and Kathryn Williams.

Yep Roc Records

Dirty five: the Truckers in 2004, with Jason Isbell (second right) and Shonna Tucker

make up for some of what had gone so badly before."

Over the last 20 years the songs from *The Dirty South* have never left their setlists, but the Truckers have lately started to open them up on stage, stretch them out and shine a light in the dark corners of familiar southern stories. *The Dirty South* also features one of their best album covers, featuring a painting by Wes Freed, the Richmond, Virginia, artist who designed nearly every bit of merch for the Truckers: T-shirts, tour poster, beer koozies, shotglasses. Freed died last autumn, midway through production on the new set. "He did a big, beautiful wraparound image that he painted on wood," recalls Hood, noting the devil-moonshiner figure in the lower corner. "There was all this stuff he was planning on doing for the re-release that he didn't get to do, but I think he would love what they've done with it."

Freed's death has left the Truckers adrift in some ways. He not only gave the Truckers a visual signature as distinctive as their music, but 25 years ago he booked some of their first shows outside of Georgia and gave them a boost to tour wider circuits. The band are working on a special single featuring a new song called "The Ballad Of Cecil McCobb", a reference to one of his recurring characters as well as a long-running alter ego.

But it's still sinking in how profoundly his absence is changing the band and how they tour. Says Cooley, "I had a moment the other day when it occurred to me that I hadn't signed any posters, which is something we normally do before a tour, especially before Homecoming. Why don't I have a big stack of posters? Then I realised: 'Oh, Wes always does the posters.' It always felt like an infinite thing, because Wes was so prolific. It felt like there would always be more."

WHEN the Truckers finally roll into Athens and take the 40 Watt stage for their first Homecoming show, they don't play "The Ballad Of Cecil McCobb" or much of anything from *Welcome 2 Club XIII*, aside from "The Driver" and the sing-along title track. They still dig deep into their catalogue to unearth some rarities and deep cuts for the Heathens assembled, but playing certain songs and addressing certain absences might be too intense, too emotional for such a celebration.

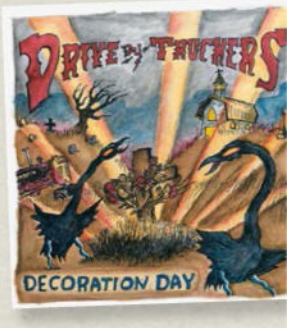
"Homecoming is unique because it's almost entirely organised by the fans," says Hood. "All we have to do is show up." In fact, the Truckers are there mainly to provide a kickass soundtrack for the week. It's the fans who are organising the Sheathens brunch on Thursday, renting out Ciné theatre on Friday for a massive get-together (with a solo set by Gonzalez), and scheduling unofficial meet-ups for hangover breakfasts at Farm Cart and Mama's Boy. Whether they're attending their first Homecoming or their 10th – or, in the case of one fan, Bill Alexander, whether they're attending their 400th rock show – the Heathens are all fierce in their devotion to the band but also friendly, welcoming. Newcomers get invitations to coveted spots on the rail and recommendations to local haunts like Creature Comforts Brewery for beer and Jittery Joe's for coffee.

"It all happens totally organically," says Sarah Henderson, who helped organise the Sheathens brunch and lent her husband his black-and-white dress for Saturday night. "That's the story of this whole thing. It started as a bunch of people who found each other and formed this community. There are all these crazy Homecoming stories where you're hanging out and having a great time. You don't want to go home yet, so let's keep hanging out. That's how these events get started. If I came down here for a week and didn't even go to the shows and just hung out with all these ➤

THE BALLAD OF WES FREED

Remembering the artist who gave the band their distinctive visual signature

ON their recent tour the Drive-By Truckers added a new song to their setlist, a quiet, sad, squirrelly number called "The Ballad Of Cecil McCobb". It's a eulogy for their old friend Wes Freed, the Richmond-based artist and musician who had worked with the band for more than 20 years before his death in September 2022. He devised the band's unofficial mascot, called the Cooleybird, a black squawking flamingo that haunts their album covers, tour posters, T-shirts, stage backdrops, and countless fan tattoos. Freed was also one of the Truckers' earliest boosters, hosting them at shows in Virginia and giving them a platform to tour other regions of the country. Without him it's likely the band wouldn't have lasted into the 2000s.



His death was both expected and sudden. He had been battling cancer for many months, but seemed to be winning. "We'd been worried sick about him for a year, but he had come out the other side," says Patterson Hood. "He was doing really good. He was in the hospital for surgery and was literally getting dressed to come home when he died. It's still so hard for me to wrap my head around."

Hood wrote "The Ballad Of Cecil McCobb" as a remembrance and a celebration, using Freed's nickname in the title. "It's full of his characters – the Moon Girls and even Hextar the Blood Possum. It sounds very true to Wes, I think, but it also sounds like the Truckers." They cut the song right before heading out on tour and plan to release it as a single, featuring their cover of one of Freed's own songs along with a booklet of his paintings.

"We can do this single because we have a definite vision about how to do it. It's all about him. But when it comes time to make another record, I have no idea what will happen. I'm excited about there being a next record sometime, but I can't imagine how it will go without him."

So much to give: Hood at the Nuçi's Space auction; (below) setlist for the final night of the Homecoming gigs

TREVOR THRIF

people, I'd still have a pretty good time. But of course we're going to the shows!"

It culminates on Saturday afternoon with a silent auction to benefit a local nonprofit called Nuçi's Space, which provides inexpensive practice areas and free mental health services to local musicians. The Truckers have been involved since the beginning, but it's the fans who donate art and memorabilia every year. In a makeshift gallery, the very first Truckers bumper sticker sits next to original paintings and hand-written setlists, signed books and test pressings. This year the fans raised more than $66,000 for the nonprofit – a new record. "Many years ago the band adopted us as their cause, and so did their fans," says Dave Chamberlin, a special events coordinator at Nuçi's Space. "The Truckers lead by example, and they've created a truly altruistic community. For one weekend you don't have to question people's motives. You know they're acting out of kindness and generosity."

Homecoming becomes a means of measuring the band's impact every year, but this year in particular it feels like they've reached another crossroads, a point where they're figuring out how to keep being the Truckers even as they hit their late fifties, even as they lose friends and collaborators. On the other hand, there's a new wave of younger artists who look to the band as examples of how to age gracefully in rock'n'roll, how to make your mark over the long haul.

"They're incomparable storytellers that rival the greatest, like Townes Van Zandt, Tom T Hall, and Vic Chesnutt," says Karly Hartzman, frontwoman for the North Carolina band Wednesday, who've toured extensively with the Truckers and opened their Saturday-night Homecoming show. "The most exciting bit of it is they're still alive and I can talk to them and eat wings backstage with them after a show in Buffalo. A lot of our songwriting heroes are dead, assholes, or just terrible examples of how to behave in this industry. The Drive-By Truckers are none of those things. They just fucking do their thing and love music. They're doing what I wanna do when I'm older."

BACK at the 40 Watt in the early hours of Sunday morning, Homecoming is winding down. The Truckers have played nearly 30 songs in more than three hours, including covers of Alice Cooper's "I'm Eighteen" and Bruce Springsteen's "State Trooper". They've toasted two long-time Heathens who couldn't make it this year. They've passed a bottle of tequila back and forth. They've no doubt flashed fans along the rail multiple times. Patterson has led the crowd in chanting "Fuck fear!" over and over before launching into "Angels & Fuselage" from *Southern Rock Opera*.

They don't even leave the stage for an encore, but instead invite nearly everyone in Athens up there with them, including producer David Barbe, their tour manager, their entire road crew, each member of Wednesday and assorted locals. Hood shouts out "People Who Died", a Jim Carroll Band cover that's been on their setlist almost as long as they've been a band. Tonight it's a celebration of everyone they've lost along the way, including Freed, and the song rapidly descends into a rip-roaring bacchanal. Everyone screams and flails at their guitars, Hood exhorting the crowd like a Baptist preacher and Jay Gonzalez running around the stage like a gremlin, stomping on pedals and detuning guitars as they're being played.

Afterwards, the crowd is slow to disperse. They say their goodbyes, pose for final photos, promise to keep in touch and marvel at the show they've just witnessed. "What separates the Drive-By Truckers from almost any rock band is their commitment to wringing every possibility out of the moment in each of their songs," observes Raucher. "It's like watching a painter or sculptor approach their raw materials, but their raw material is just the space of the club."

For the band – and especially for Hood and Cooley – Homecoming is a yearly reminder that they've got more things to say and more shows to play; more specifically, they've got an autumn tour to plan and another boxset to assemble, this time for 2003's *Decoration Day*.

"I don't know what would happen if I couldn't do this thing I do," says Hood. "For a while I was afraid I might never get to do it again. To have your whole identity wrapped up in this thing can be scary. It's maybe not healthy, but you get a lot of people in the audience yelling along with you and it feels new."

He admits they probably won't be releasing new material any time soon, but the Truckers aren't going anywhere for a while. "It feels like a big chapter is wrapping up for sure, but I don't feel like we're anywhere near done yet."

The Complete Dirty South is released on June 16, 2023 via New West Records. Where The Devil Don't Stay, Stephen Deusner's biography of the band, is published by University Of Texas Press

IT'S GREAT TO BE LIVE!

How to buy... Drive-By Truckers live

ALABAMA ASS WHUPPIN'
TERMINUS, 2000
Just three years and two self-released albums into their tumultuous career, the Truckers proved themselves a formidable live act with this set of songs recorded around the South, featuring an early four-man lineup. Patterson Hood revels in some epic stage banter on "The Avon Lady", and they put their own indelible stamp on The Jim Carroll Band's "People Who Died", which is still a live staple nearly 25 years later. **8/10**

LIVE FROM AUSTIN, TX
NEW WEST, 2009
The band deliver a fine performance that showcases the chemistry between Hood and Mike Cooley – and even gives bassist Shonna Tucker a chance to shine – but the crowd at this venerable showcase is perhaps a tad too well behaved. However, they do deliver what may be the definitive version of "18 Wheels Of Love", Hood's ode to his mom's marriage to truck driver named Chester. **7/10**

IT'S GREAT TO BE ALIVE!
NEW WEST, 2015
The Truckers' English Oceans tour culminated with a multi-night stand at the historic Fillmore West, and this triple-live album stands as both a monument to the their power as a live act and an exhaustive career retrospective. They draw from every corner of their sprawling catalogue, including two songs from their early band Adam's House Cat. **9/10**

PLAN 9 MUSIC, JULY 13, 2006
NEW WEST, 2021
While on a hellacious tour opening for The Black Crowes, the Truckers booked a gig at this Richmond, Virginia, record store and gave a show that's both raucous and cathartic. To date, it's the only official live recording featuring Jason Isbell, who delivers a moving cover of The Rolling Stones' "Miracle Mile" – although he was out of the band in less than a year's time. **9/10**

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03 JUNE	MANCHESTER	O_2 RITZ	
04 JUNE	NORWICH	EPIC STUDIOS	
07 JUNE	EDINBURGH	QUEENS HALL	
08 JUNE	NEWCASTLE	BOILER SHOP	
09 JUNE	GLASGOW	BARROWLANDS	
12 JUNE	BIRMINGHAM	TOWN HALL	
14 JUNE	BOURNEMOUTH	O_2 ACADEMY	
16 JUNE	LONDON	ROUNDHOUSE	
19 JUNE	NORTHAMPTON	ROADMENDER	
21 JUNE	CAMBRIDGE	JUNCTION	
22 JUNE	COVENTRY	HMV EMPIRE	
23 JUNE	NOTTINGHAM	ROCK CITY	
28 JUNE	GUILDFORD	G LIVE	
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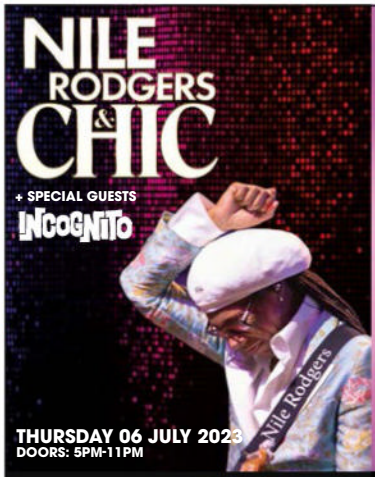

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Fri 27 Oct SHEFFIELD	Sat 02 Dec BEDFORD	Fri 29 Mar CARDIFF	Sat 04 May BLACKBURN
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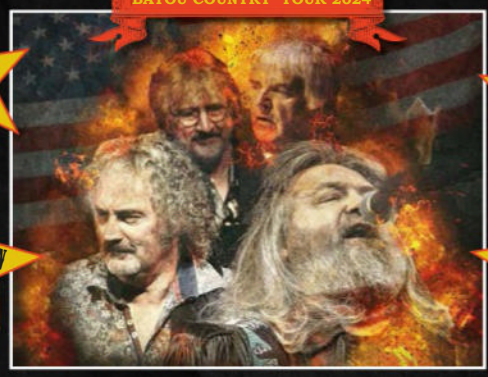

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FRI 19 JAN BUXTON OPERA HOUSE	THU 15 FEB GLOUCESTER GUILDHALL	FRI 08 MAR BATH THE FORUM	FRI 29 MAR EDINBURGH QUEENS HALL
SAT 20 JAN MANCHESTER O_2 RITZ	SAT 17 FEB BIRMINGHAM THE CROSSING	SAT 09 MAR EXETER CORN EXCHANGE	SAT 30 MAR PERTH CONCERT HALL
THU 25 JAN COLCHESTER ARTS CENTRE	THU 22 FEB NEWCASTLE WYLAM BREWERY	FRI 15 MAR CARDIFF TRAMSHED	SUN 31 MAR ABERDEEN MUSIC HALL
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SAT 27 JAN BASINGSTOKE THE ANVIL	SAT 24 FEB SCARBOROUGH THE SPA	THU 21 MAR WORTHING THE VENUE	SAT 06 APR LONDON INDIGO AT THE O2
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PLACE TO BE

Forty-eight years on from his untimely death, the tragic myth of **NICK DRAKE** persists. But there is *another* Nick Drake: the spirited and untroubled young man, on the cusp of a bright future, who travelled to Europe and North Africa in pursuit of adventure and honed his skills along the way. Here, Drake's school friends, fellow travellers and assorted eyewitnesses relive the freewheeling times – from playing folk clubs in Aix-en-Provence to an audience with the Stones in Marrakesh. "It was absolutely central to Nick becoming Nick Drake," one close confidant tells Nick Hasted. "It opened his eyes to a lot of things..."

Photo by VICTORIA WAYMOUTH

Smoke without fire: Drake at home with his organ in the late '60s

MARCH 29, 2023. Set back from a busy modern street in Wandsworth, south London, are a row of terraced houses dating from 1710. Inside one of these, Jeremy Mason sits in a wood-panelled room, with bookcases lined with his vast Oscar Wilde collection and Chinese porcelain from his days as an oriental dealer. Mason is 74 – but as a teenager at Marlborough College and for a formative, dreamy season in Aix-en-Provence in the South of France, he was a friend of Nick Drake.

His wife Jo enters with tea and biscuits for *Uncut*, as Mason settles in to spend the afternoon reminiscing about his old schoolmate. Alongside the Wildes, Mason's house also contains Drake mementos – such as a pocket edition of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal*, with a detail of three women from Ingres' painting *The Turkish Bath* on its maroon cover. Drake kept this copy to hand as he walked Aix's ancient streets. Then Mason opens the doors of an old, shelved cupboard to reveal the albums that he and Drake heard at Marlborough.

"Nick guided my musical tastes, and these are the records we listened to," explains Mason. "This shows where we were coming from. *Organ Grinder's Swing*, Jimmy Smith. We were rather keen on Astrud Gilberto. Charlie Parker, "Ornithology". Miles Davis, *Quiet Nights*. Dylan, Dylan, Dylan. Have a look at this – Graham Bond Organisation, *The Sound Of '65*. They were our heroes for a term or two."

He reads aloud a note scribbled on the album sleeve: "'Performed at the Manor House Friday evening, 12 o'clock on the 29th of October', where Ginger Baker's solo so amazed Nick he poured a pint down his front. We played that record endlessly. What else? Well, we weren't averse to The Beatles," he says, pulling out *Revolver*. "Nick liked The Beatles and the Stones. The Zombies, *Begin Here*. He liked *this* very much indeed – John Hammond, *Big City Blues*."

Mason then pulls out another sheaf of battered LPs. These are the original albums that he and Drake had shared when they were 18, living in an apartment in Aix. "There's one of the ones I bought with him there – Adamo, *Olympia 67*. Typically French. 'Inshallah' was his great song. We listened to Johnny Hallyday, too. *The Brandenburg Concertos*. Here's another record we shared – Segovia, *Les Romantiques*. We played the side-long 'Sonata Romantica' a lot in Aix. Nick listened with a guitar-player's understanding.

"We divided the LPs up when we broke up the flat," continues Mason. "Nick took John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn.

> "AFTER AIX, NICK WENT HELTER-SKELTER INTO MUSIC"
> **JEREMY MASON**

He had moved into the songwriter-guitarist realm by then."

Drake is often viewed now through the prism of his final three years – when he retreated to Far Leys, his parents' home in Tanworth-in-Arden, Warwickshire, as depression closed in, culminating in his fatal overdose on November 25, 1974 aged just 26. Taken with the delicate magic of his three studio albums – *Five Leaves Left* (1969), *Bryter Layter* (1971) and *Pink Moon* (1972) –Drake has become a romantic, desolate figure, seemingly crippled by failure and, in one of the biggest myths that has built up since his death, stage fright. But this wasn't the boy his teenage friends remember. "Forget the doomed youth bit," counsels Mason. "When I knew him, he was a perfectly normal English public schoolboy. We had a laugh. There was none of this angst. He couldn't wait to perform for everybody."

Rather than the diminished figure at the end of a short life, when he had all but stopped making music, Drake's friends fondly remember him in the golden months between February and May 1967 when his songwriting first bloomed in Aix-en-Provence.

"Without Aix, it might not have happened for Nick," says Simon Crocker, another Marlburian who travelled to France with him. "Aix was absolutely central to Nick becoming Nick Drake, if you like. I think it opened his eyes to a lot of things. It gave him a chance to hone his guitar skills, start to write songs, and think this was something he could do. We were all changed in Aix."

"Aix was an enclave of 17- and 18-year-old students, running around, falling in love, and smoking whatever we had," remembers Robin Frederick, a Californian singer-songwriter who met Drake there. "Nick had his friends with him. It was ideal." During a dramatic detour to Morocco, he gained an audience with the Stones, even impressing Mick Jagger. "The fact that he went and played to the Stones suggests he had a certain amount of confidence," argues Richard Charkin, who put him up to it. Meanwhile, the languid, hazy beauty of the songs on *Five Leaves Left* began to germinate during this overseas sojourn.

But Drake's future was otherwise still unwritten. "After Aix, Nick went helter-skelter straight into music," says Mason. "But there was a period of a few months, where a new world took shape. It was innocent, without any thought of fame and fortune. It's hovering in aspic, with the sun shining in the South of France, and Nick getting into playing music. This glorious moment..." ➤

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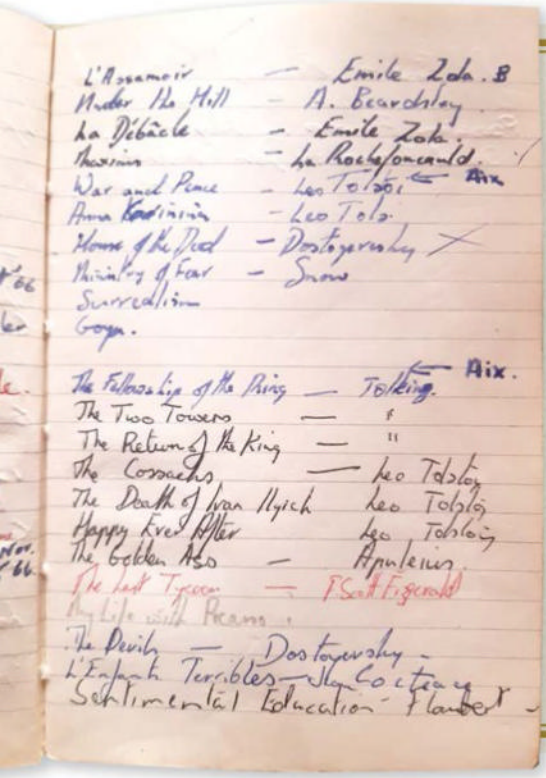
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Thoughts — La Rochefoucauld
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Thinking of Far — Snow
Surrealism
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← Aix.
The Fellowship of the Ring — Tolkien.
The Two Towers — "
The Return of the King — "
The Cossacks — Leo Tolstoy
The Death of Ivan Ilyich — Leo Tolstoy
Happy Ever After — Leo Tolstoy
The Golden Ass — Apuleius
The Last Tycoon — F Scott Fitzgerald
The Devils — Dostoyevsky
L'Enfants Terribles — Jean Cocteau
Sentimental Education — Flaubert

"WE WERE SO PRETENTIOUS!"

Nick Drake's reading list

JEREMY Mason is leafing through the small black notebook in which he jotted down the titles of books he read during the '60s. It also lists the books he shared with Drake during their two teenage seasons in France. "In September 1966," he says, "when Nick was at my parents' house in France and we were 16, we read Camus. *The Outsider*, *The Plague*, *The Fall*. We were very French-oriented. *Crime And Punishment*, *The Old Man And The Sea*, *The Grapes Of Wrath*, *Catcher In The Rye*. Christopher Isherwood. Dante. We were quite keen on 'Howl' by Ginsberg. Günter Grass, Gide's *The Immoralist*, Tom Wolfe's *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, Carson McCullers' *The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter*. Balzac, Flaubert. Are you getting a picture?"

He turns a page, to a list headed by the brief indented word "-Aix". These are the books he and Drake passed between them in their shared bedroom in Aix-en-Provence in 1967.

- ***The Lord Of The Rings*** **– Tolkien**
- ***The Cossacks*** **– Tolstoy**
- ***The Death Of Ivan Ilyich*** **– Tolstoy**
- ***Happy Ever After*** **– Tolstoy**
- ***The Golden Ass*** **– Apuleius**
- ***The Last Tycoon*** **– Fitzgerald**
- ***The Devils*** **– Dostoevsky**
- ***Les Enfants Terribles*** **– Cocteau**
- ***Sentimental Education*** **– Flaubert**
- ***And Quiet Flows The Don*** **– Sholokhov**
- ***War And Peace*** **– Tolstoy**

The notebook is blank after Aix. "I stopped writing, or tore out what came next," says Mason. "That list is a very good summary of where our minds were at then. When we talked about books, we were exchanging ideas. We had a lively interest in everything, and the music went along with it. We were reading all these books and listening to modern jazz. We were so fucking pretentious! We thought the world was our oyster – and intellectually we thought we were getting there."

Pastoral pursuits: 19-year-old Drake in Selborne, Hampshire, 1967

Relatable: Nick with his mother Molly and sister Gabrielle, late '60s

TIME HAS TOLD

Richard Morton Jack's new biography offers the deepest dive yet into Drake's brief life. *By Michael Bonner*

IN a small turreted room in Wenlock Priory sits a trunk of clothes that belonged to Nick Drake. Gabrielle Drake has owned the prior's 16th-century private apartments since the 1980s, where she has meticulously and painstakingly restored one room after another. One room, however, has been turned over to her late brother, Nick. Aside from the trunk of his clothes, the plain details of a life are laid bare: boxes with letters, school reports, university essays, bank statements, tax returns, his recording contracts, photo albums and old passports along with posthumous publishing and royalty statements.

Among other sources, including his own new interviews with Drake's friends and fellow musicians, this material has been of critical importance to author Richard Morton Jack, who has spent five years working on his new biography, *Nick Drake – The Life*. There, in the turreted room, sifting through the boxes, Morton Jack set out on a detailed archeological survey of Drake's short life and slender musical career – three albums released between 1969 and 1972 prior to his death in November 1974 aged 26. Sometimes, he discovered, the slightest details could yield unexpected results. "There were small but satisfying bits of puzzle," Morton Jack tells *Uncut*. "I'd find a letter from Nick's grandmother saying, 'Happy birthday, here's a cheque for something.' So I'd think, 'Ah, that's how he afforded his new guitar!' I was able to be absolutely forensic about almost every aspect of his life."

Morton Jack had previously helped with research for Gabrielle and Cally Calloman, who manages Drake's musical estate, on 2014's coffee-table volume, *Remembered For A While*. Along with essays, tributes and analysis, the book also included previously unseen photographs, family letters and Drake's father Rodney's diaries. "It was a really useful accompaniment to a serious fans' appreciation of Nick's work and a good way of scratching itches as far as curiosity about his life went," says Morton Jack. "But I felt that it was a bit of a shame that there wasn't a proper narrative. I think Cally was a bit resistant to the idea of 'authorising' a biography, because that word would carry with it connotations of control and of most importantly of saying this is the one holy scripture on Nick. Gabrielle was resistant to that, too, because she knows better than anyone how baffling and private and inscrutable her brother was."

Critically, Morton Jack also intended to dispel many of the myths and inaccuracies that have accumulated around Drake – a strategy that clearly gained approval from Gabrielle. Writing in her introduction to *The Life*, Gabrielle says, "This not an Authorised Biography... But it is true that this is the only biography of my brother that has been written with my blessing."

Gabrielle's blessing also unlocked a number of doors that may otherwise have remained firmly shut. "Nick's London friends have been

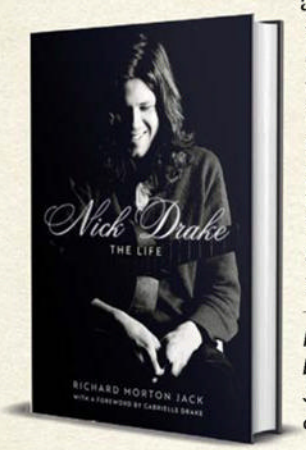
RODNEY DRAKE © BRYTER MUSIC

least communicated with because they're private individuals who have no desire for self-publicity and who aren't normally the sort of people that give interviews," says Morton Jack. "They were happy to invite me to their homes and show me their photo albums – especially Sophia Ryde, who died very sadly during the course of writing the book, but not before she and I had spent a pretty long time together, going over all her memories. That wouldn't have been possible without Gabrielle's involvement."

Morton Jack confirms that there are no great revelations in the book – "'Oh, my god, he was gay!' Or, 'Oh my god, he was on heroin!' There was nothing like that." Instead, one of the book's great achievements is how a strong consensus of opinion builds around Nick's character. "His friends remember him vividly," explains Morton Jack. "I tried to include stories, especially ones which involve any sort of physicality with him. Like a box of matches exploding and Nick jumping up into the air. Someone told a story about cutting her arm and Nick being very helpful with finding bandages. Someone else told a story about Nick falling into a roof space and crashing through the ceiling. I felt those stories were worth including. They tethered him to us mere mortals. There's a tendency to think of Nick as some celestial apparition. He was a normal bloke and most of his friends remember him quite well.

"IT'S THE ONLY BIOGRAPHY WITH MY BLESSING"
GABRIELLE DRAKE

"One of the myths that's built up around Nick was that he was crippled by stage fright. Literally no-one said that to me in the course of putting the book together. It was more that he thought he was wasting his time performing on stages in front of strangers who were clinking glasses. But he made lists of producers and made a tape, went round and he hustled – not to a huge extent, because he was lucky enough to be picked up quite quickly – but he was willing to do that. I think that says a lot about the kind of person he was."



Nick Drake: The Life is published by John Murray Press on June 8

THERE were certainly few clouds on young Nick Drake's horizon. Born in colonial Burma in 1948, he moved with his loving, supportive family to bucolic Tanworth-in-Arden when he was four. An untroubled childhood followed the approved upper-middle class course, as he was sent away to Marlborough College, a public school in Wiltshire, in 1962. Where the likes of Eton prepared its pupils to run the country, if not the world, Marlborough was more liberal, suiting Nick's easy-going nature.

Jeremy Mason and Nick Drake en route to Aix in January 1967

"The school encouraged you to follow your interests," says Crocker. "Nick and I formed an R&B band with a horn section, The Perfumed Gardeners. Nick was never the leader, but he was very confident in those days. He loved playing live. He was the one who said, 'Oh, gosh, let's put a band together.' He chose the material and arranged it. He was lead singer, so played mainly at the piano, as well as saxophone. He was good."

It's hard to imagine the subsequently soft-voiced Drake as an R&B belter, and though he admired Chris Farlowe's booming delivery, he made little attempt to follow suit. "He sang slightly harder than when he was recorded later," says Croker. "But he wasn't shouting. He had a good voice and sang clearly, but he didn't overdo it. He was contained."

Attractive and athletic, much came easily to Drake in those days, from female attention to sport to music. But it never seemed in his nature to chase after any of them. "Nick was certainly laid-back," says Mason. "You have to picture us wandering across the playing fields on a long summer's evening looking for somewhere to have a fag. Nick was always sloping off somewhere, which sums him up. Shoulders slightly hunched, because he was tall [*6ft 2ins*], and always wearing soft moccasins. He wasn't fast or slow, he just lolloped.

"NICK WAS CONFIDENT IN THOSE DAYS"
SIMON CROCKER

"When he's leaning against a wall in photos, that's pretty much Nick," continues Mason. "The word is *sprezzatura*. It means what appears to be complete disregard is well thought out. Beneath that, like ducks' legs paddling in a pond, there was all this ambition. I like to think he always assumed that he was going to produce these records and blow the world apart."

"He was a very bright guy, who dressed like a slightly smart hobo," says Crocker. "He never hurried particularly. He took the time he needed and wanted to take. He was observant. He certainly had his own opinions, but he listened and chose his moment to talk. If there was something he disagreed with, he'd jump in and could be quite acerbic. But generally, he was a very nice, quite quiet, modest guy. We could have a laugh together, at the absurdities of life, and ourselves."

Drake's studies soon took a back seat as he developed a broader appetite for life. "He was cool and introverted, but not as introverted as later on," says Mason. "He was quite happy to join in almost everything. We went drinking in pubs when we shouldn't have done, sneaking out through the back lanes. Nick got sloshed quite readily. We went to a [*post-Impressionist French painter Pierre*] Bonard exhibition too [*at the Royal Academy in winter 1966*]. To his dying day, he spoke the Queen's English in a public school manner. He sang that way, too. This is the culture Nick came from."

Drake's music tastes moved with the times. He and Mason regularly trekked up to Soho, visiting the clubs ruled by Georgie Fame, Zoot Money, Chris Farlowe and Graham Bond. "We'd hitch up from Marlborough to all-nighters at the Flamingo, where Christine Keeler used to go and American servicemen bought their drugs," remembers Mason. "You can imagine two 17-year-old public schoolboys – we didn't realise it was a den of iniquity. I never saw Nick dance – he wasn't *that* exuberant..."

The Battersea flat belonging to his actress sister Gabrielle served as a crash pad during extended London forays. ➤

SIMON CROCKER

Nick also absorbed bossa nova's soft lilt – and Miles and Gil Evans' version of it, *Quiet Nights* – alongside an abiding love of Dylan, country blues and classical music. He also kept pace with jazz. "Nick understood that continuous blanket of sound Coltrane went into with *Ascension*," says Mason.

Drake bought an acoustic guitar in December 1964. He quietly developed his playing over the next two years, although music didn't dominate his schooldays. "I wouldn't have defined Nick as a musician then," says Crocker.

"Nick liked being a good athlete, too," adds Mason. "We had to go and watch him run."

Drake also took several increasingly adventurous trips to France, hitching with his friend Dave Wright through the French Riviera to Germany in August 1965. Then, after finishing at Marlborough in July 1966, he drove with four friends via St-Tropez to Mason's parents' holiday home in Lédenon, south-eastern France, strumming his guitar to fascinated locals along the way. "I have visions of him sitting on the small crossroads near the house," says Mason. "The village gathered round."

After spending the rest of 1966 finger-picking on his new Levin guitar and hanging out with friends in Chelsea – where he first tried pot – Drake scraped into Cambridge University's Fitzwilliam College. But owing to a delayed entrance exam, he wasn't due to go up until October 1967. Fortuitously, Crocker and Mason had both signed up for French courses at Université d'Aix-Marseilles, starting in February. Drake went, too. "Nick had become obsessed with France," says Crocker. "We were keen to get out of England. We just thought, 'This is a huge adventure.'"

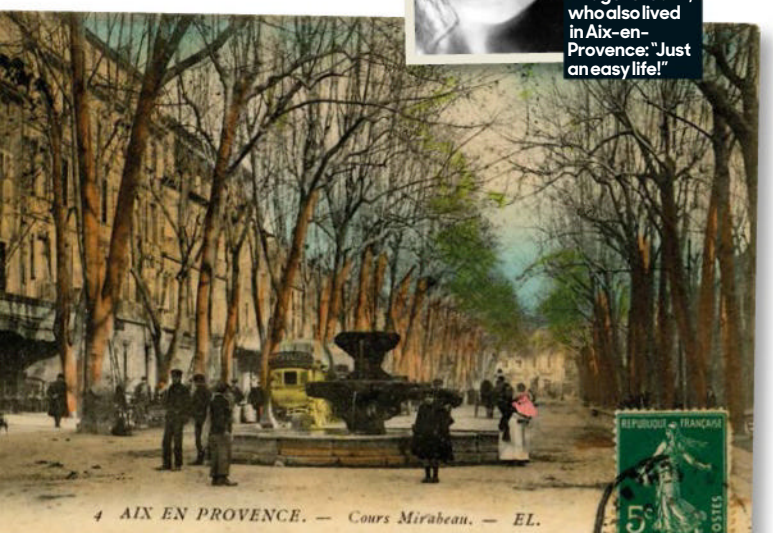
Picturing Nick: Jeremy Mason's sketch of Drake playing guitar in Aix-en-Provence

JEAN-Louis Pujol moved to Aix-en-Provence in 1965, where he enjoyed running local folk clubs. He still lives there today. For him, it is easy enough to recall the small, Roman-built spa town as it was in February 1967. "In Provence they call it 'the beautiful, sleeping city,'" he says. "In those days, it was mainly a student town. Part of the city was created in the 17th and 18th centuries, with beautiful buildings famous for their sculptured wooden doors, and a few narrow medieval streets. Students mainly stayed in the old city, where it was like *La Bohème*! It was a very, very quiet town. For the students, it was like heaven."

Bridget St John was a contemporary of Drake's at the university – although they didn't meet in Aix. She befriended him later and shared bills with him in London. She still fondly remembers the vibes in Aix. "It was a beautiful, comforting old town," she tells *Uncut*. "You could choose fresh sardines from Marseille at the market, which they would grill for you, and you'd sit and eat them with a baguette and wine. Just an easy life! It was such a romantic place. You could just sit and play guitar."

> "HE'D SPEND HOURS WORKING ON HIS FINGER-PICKING"
> **ROBIN FREDERICK**

Bridget St John, who also lived in Aix-en-Provence: "Just an easy life!"



Drake and his friends arrived in Aix on February 11, shattered after a full day's travel from London. Finding no accommodation waiting, they were considerably less sanguine about their new home. Eventually, they found spaces at the Résidence Sextius student apartment block. "It was modern, grey architecture," remembers Crocker. "When we saw it, it was pissing down, bleak and depressing."

They rented two rooms, with Drake and Mason sharing one of them. "They were like concrete spaces, but we didn't care," says Crocker.

"We were on the cusp, from public school to real life – a pretty dramatic moment," adds Mason. In common with most of their fellow foreign students, the university curriculum barely detained them. Music mattered more. "I'd brought my Dansette record player," says Crocker. "I bought Donovan's *Mellow Yellow*, which Nick played to death – that and Bert Jansch. At Marlborough, I have no memory of him being that interested in folk music, though he probably was. It was in Aix that he suddenly started playing Bert Jansch numbers."

Drake played guitar whenever he could, intensifying efforts he'd made in the six months since Marlborough. "He suddenly homed in on it," says Crocker. "If he'd go on too long, we'd have to tell him, 'For Christ's sake, we want to go to sleep!' But he was good, that was the great thing. He got better, because he would play for long periods. I'm sure even then he thought, 'Oh God, wouldn't it be great if I could do something that involved music?' I think those ambitions happened more after Aix. But people said he was good, so he kept on going. He was in the egg – and the egg was breaking open!"

In their room in Aix, Mason sketched Drake with his head hunched down over his instrument, deep in concentration. It's the same intense focus that producer John Wood later saw in the studio. Robin Frederick agrees. "There's a bootleg where Nick says, 'Not the right tempo' – and it is only a hair's difference. He had a clock-like sense of time. He'd spend hours working on his finger-picking. In Aix, he had an incredibly fluid blues style."

What Drake played also struck his listeners. "His guitar's tuning was interesting," says Mason. "How many nights did I listen to him as he unwound the strings 'til they were floppy, and then tuned it up?" For Jean-Louis Pujol, a guitarist himself, the results were startling. "He detuned all the time, so it was impossible for others to play the same way. He was brave on the guitar." It's a sound that still intrigues guitarists, as Stick In The Wheel's Ian Carter attests. "My initial attraction to Nick Drake was his unique approach to harmony – it's not just major or minor, there's an ambiguity in the key. There were things he did with rhythm that mirrored Son House, Charley Patton and Bukka White."

February 24, meanwhile, proved to be an auspicious date. "We went down to Jeremy's parents' house in Lédenon and we recorded Nick on a Philips tape recorder," remembers Crocker of Drake's recording debut. "I've no idea where it is now. He had only written one or two things."

Industry hardly characterised their season in Aix. "Nick wasn't driven," explains Mason. "It was a very vague life, because we didn't have enough to do. So we drifted. There were days when we got up in what we thought was the morning, only to find we'd slept the whole day through."

JEREMY MASON; CULTURE CLUB/GETTY IMAGES; GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS

Unique world view: Nick Drake in London, August 16, 1970, a year after releasing *Five Leaves Left*

Though it was cold at first, in Mason's memory the sun never set. "It was spring and it was glorious. We didn't have heating in the flats so we all sat outside, where Nick played guitar. I don't remember it raining, though it must have done. What better place to grow up? It was utterly freewheeling."

There was a significant music scene for such a small city, though little chance for Drake to absorb the chansons some claim to have heard in his songs. "The *club de poet* with French songs was after Nick's time," says Pujol, whose folk nights ran in the Roman cellar at La Tartane restaurant. "It looked like a cave," recalls Robin Frederick. "It was rough-hewn, dark and damp, seating about 30, with little round, candlelit tables."

"I met him dozens of times in the street, because Aix is very small – you can cross it in 15 minutes," says Pujol. "But he didn't come to Club de la Tartane often; I don't think he liked playing so much for other people. When he played, people would be interested and surprised by his sound. But he didn't play his own songs in public."

At Pujol's, Drake even sat in once with a jazz group, playing sax and piano. "We had those instruments and if you wanted a gig with friends, you could pick them up," confirms Pujol. "It was really a jazz ambience, free. People were having a drink and carried on talking while you were playing. It was only students. In that sense, it was not too risky for Nick. You could feel almost like you were at home when you were there."

Most of Drake's public performances were even looser affairs. "The main street is Cours Mirabeau, where every 100 metres there's a fountain," says Pujol, setting the scene. "Jean Cocteau said that if you close your eyes, you can find your way just following the sound of them. On the left side there are cafés where the students met. If you had a guitar, you could sing outside and make some money. I saw Nick play in front a café for law students, Le Grillon."

This was a very different Nick Drake to the solemn, stilted performer of legend. "He couldn't play his style in the streets, it was too difficult to detune," says Pujol. "You had to be loud and efficient. He played Bob Dylan and popular songs."

On these occasions, Drake was usually accompanied by his friends. "I held the hat out," Mason recalls. "Or Simon did..."

Looking back on the ways in which he fitted in to the music community in Aix, Pujol considers Drake to be essentially comfortable among like-minded individuals but his willingness to engage on casual terms outside his immediate social circle only extended so far.

"It was a friendly, artistically stimulating town," he says. "But Nick wanted to be alone, with his friends, and that was all. He was not interested in meeting French people, he didn't care. I don't even know if he spoke French. He was very friendly with me, but he wasn't interested in Aix-en-Provence."

Simon Crocker concurs, to some extent. From the perspective of Drake's inner circle in Aix, he understands that it was not necessarily for someone as independently minded as Drake to simply establish casual friendships.

"People liked being with Nick, he had a real charm," he says. "But it wasn't important for him to make masses of friends, or even to be liked, particularly. He could be stubborn at times. If he didn't want to do something, he wasn't going to do it. There was a backbone there, definitely. But he was difficult for people to get a grip of."

Drake did bond with Robin Frederick, who with a weekly spot singing her own songs at La Tartane, was a step ahead of him. They began meeting at her apartment, where Grateful Dead posters on the walls signalled changing times.

"I remember him at the front door with his guitar," she says. "Every time was the same. He'd be wearing what he's wearing on *Five Leaves Left*, all he ever wore – velvet jacket, white shirt and jeans. He always looked crisp, neat and clean. He didn't say hello. We'd have a glass of red wine and light up. The only light was the gas fire, and music was the way we talked, sitting facing each other. We all knew the same songs, but he changed them, so I couldn't join in. He was self-sufficient."

Robin Frederick: "Music was the way we talked"

As Mason and Crocker attest, Drake seemed essentially asexual, ➤

ESTATE OF KEITH MORRIS/GETTY IMAGES; ROBIN FREDERICK

Rockabilly approach: Fontaines DC

"WE WANTED THE SONGS TURNED INSIDE-OUT!"

An all-star covers album adds to Nick Drake's legacy. *By Nick Hasted*

THE idea that Nick Drake would have a legacy might have seemed unlikely in 1974, when only Nick Kent's outspoken *NME* obituary marked his passing. But since Molly Drake's death in 1993, Gabrielle Drake and Cally Calloman have worked diligently and sensitively to embellish his short life and slender body of work with archival albums such as *A Treasury* (2004) and *Family Tree* (2007) as well as 2014's coffee-table volume, *Remembered For A While*.

The latest attempt to deepen the possibilities of Drake's music, *The Endless Coloured Ways: The Songs Of Nick Drake* finds a disparate collection of artists radically reinventing his songbook.

"I didn't want to trouble artists who'd done great versions of Nick's songs before," says Callomon. "I wanted plunging contrasts, to show the elasticity of Nick's songs."

So Fontaines DC's grinding, rockabilly rendition of "Cello Song" contrasts with Ben Harper's rolling R&B piano take on "Time Has Told Me". Elsewhere, you'll find Guy Garvey's saloon-singing on "Saturday Sun", John Parish and Aldous Harding's motorik goove on "Three Hours" and Nadia Reid's bright take on "Poor Boy".

"We wanted the songs turned inside-out," confirms Jeremy Lascelles, CEO of Drake's catalogue publisher Blue Raincoat Music. "Some diehard Nick Drake fans responded with shock and horror at Fontaines DC's 'Cello Song', but Fontaines fans were loving it, saying, 'Who is Nick Drake?' That's what we want!"

From the artists' perspective, there was also an opportunity to bring age and experience to Drake's works. In the case of John Grant, for instance, he could approach the reflective "Day Is Done" from an older viewpoint that Drake never reached, delivering lines like "*When the party's through/Seems so very sad for you*" with accumulated wisdom and pathos.

"It felt that way when I was doing it," Grant agrees. "It means more now I'm 54, because I was quite young when I first heard it, and I didn't know anything about a wasted life yet!"

It's hard to imagine in the years immediately following Drake's death that a project like this could ever transpire.

"In the late '80s and early '90s, nothing was happening," says Callomon, who at that point worked at Island Records. "Because Chris Blackwell was close to Nick, there was no question of Island deleting his albums – but a few artists like Peter Buck and Paul Weller mentioning him were the only things in the background. Then in 1994 I persuaded Chris to do a best-of, *Way To Blue: An Introduction To Nick Drake*. Gabrielle was coming into Island, too, because she'd just taken over the estate."

While *Way To Blue* introduced Drake's music to a new audience of music fans, his profile took a dramatic turn upwards in 1999, transforming Drake from a hidden gem to a bona fide chart star.

"Volkswagen wanted to use 'Pink Moon' on an American TV ad," explains Calloman. "We thought the ad was really good. Then it erupted. In America, *Pink Moon* went from selling nothing to being Nick's biggest-selling album."

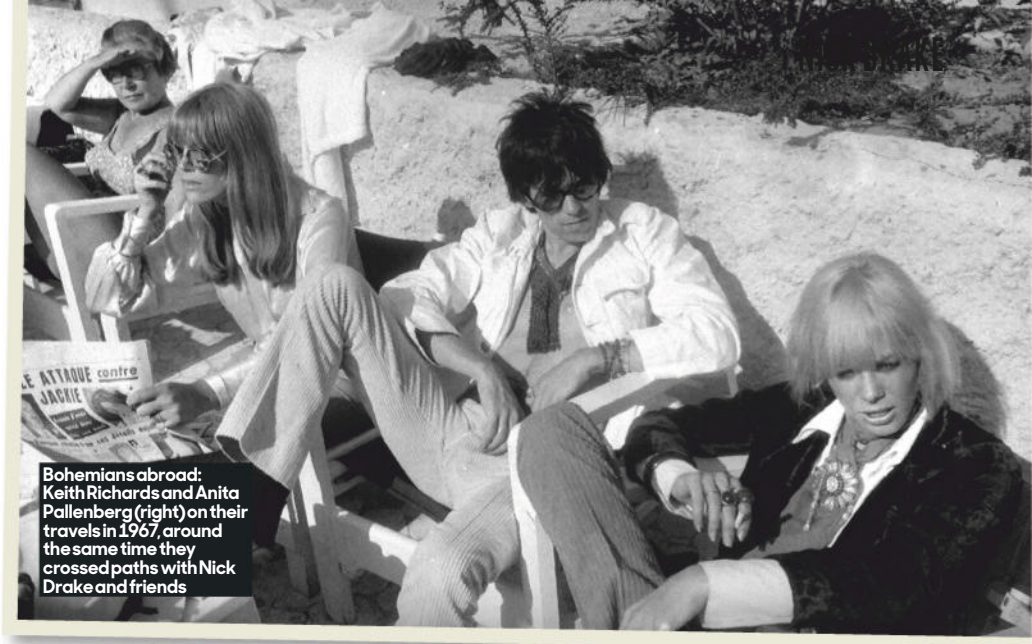
Joe Henry, who covers "Time Of No Reply" on *The Endless Coloured Ways*, vividly remembers the impact of the Volkswagen commercial. "Before that ad introduced people to the lonesome intimacy of 'Pink Moon', Nick Drake was only known by a small, passionate group of people. When Bob Dylan licensed a song in an ad and a journalist challenged him on selling out, he brought up 'Pink Moon' and said, 'Do you wish all those people *didn't* discover Nick Drake?'"

In 2021, when Blue Raincoat signed the publishing deal for Drake's catalogue, Gabrielle Drake reflected that she had done her "best to protect my brother's legacy" for nearly 50 years. "My reward has been witnessing the burgeoning recognition of his talent... The downside has been trying to anticipate his wishes... in his utter absence I have so often agonised about what to do."

Callomon explains about the responsibilities behind their decision-making processes.

DANIEL TOPETE

Aldous Harding and Guy Garvey



Bohemians abroad: Keith Richards and Anita Pallenberg (right) on their travels in 1967, around the same time they crossed paths with Nick Drake and friends

"When we said yes to *Garden State* [*Zach Braff's 2004 film, which uses 'One Of These Things First'*], you could see its impact on Nick's sales. But we turn down so many terrible uses. French McDonald's wanted to use Nick and the ad was amazing. But I just think of deforestation and wouldn't align Nick with that. Because Nick had a mental illness, there may be a passage in a film where someone's having a mental breakdown, and they think, 'We'll use Nick Drake.' But when Nick was ill he didn't write and I don't want his songs aligned with that. It devalues mental illness to sum it up in a song.

"There have been times when people have tried to end the mystery of Nick Drake," continues Callomon. "So we always turn down any offers of biopics, however lucrative. Because you're always ruining someone's Nick Drake. We've tried very hard not to, as Gabrielle says, trample dreams in that respect."

Richard Morton Jack's new biography presented a similar problem. "My fear was he was going to fill mystery with conjecture. But Richard's book is incredibly well informed about his Nick Drake. And there are still huge gaps."

"At 13 when I was at school and having a bit of a hard time time," confides Callomon, "music got me through. I'd love a 13-year-old to discover Nick through the Fontaines and get that help. Nick used to say he hoped one of his songs made a difference to somebody. Well, we've gone past one song..."

The Endless Coloured Ways: The Songs Of Nick Drake is released on July 7 by Chrysalis

attracting women but appearing indifferent. Frederick still found his music magnetic. "It was so heartbreaking to hear him sing and play the palest blues."

This wasn't, though, the singing voice familiar from his albums. "He was singing out blues and Dylan in my room. He was not whispering! He had a 1960s folk-singer, clear baritone voice, completely different to *Five Leaves Left*. That other voice seems to have developed as he was writing those songs in his room, or singing into Simon's mic."

They were supposed to meet at a café one day, but he stood her up. Without a word, Nick Drake had left for Morocco.

MIKE Hill, another foreign student at Aix, suggested heading to North Africa for the Easter break on March 7. Four of them went: Drake, Hill and his Paris acquaintance Richard Charkin and Julian Raby, a student in Résidence Sextius.

"Mike fancied himself as a bit of a rally driver," Charkin tells *Uncut*. "He had a Cortina GT. The idea was to drive to Chad – fuck knows how. Mike was some sort of viscount, Julian was more cerebral and Nick was always playing his guitar."

> "MICK AND KEITH SAID, 'COME AND SEE US'"
> RICHARD CHARKIN

They were a little ahead of the hippie trail, with its hunger for eastern culture and high-grade hash. Still, "tired and possibly a little stoned", according to Charkin, they visited the Alhambra, Granada's Moorish fortress complex in the Sierra Nevada mountains that he describes as "an extraordinary experience, and our first exposure to Islamic art and culture". From Gibraltar, they took the ferry across to Tangier. There the rhythms of Morocco were "a major hit with me", Drake wrote home to his parents.

"Then we ran into this crowd of people outside the El Minzah hotel, that was housing the Stones," says Charkin. "I think they'd come to visit Paul Bowles."

As it transpired, the Stones had been tracing much the same route through Spain and Morocco, fleeing the heat of the Redlands drug bust on February 12. Mick Jagger, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Anita Pallenberg and an entourage including art dealer Robert Fraser and the avant-garde artist and poet Brion Gysin had been in the El Minzah since March 5. Charkin cheekily rang up to their rooms suggesting Nick serenade them, although he got nowhere.

Driving at breakneck speed, Hill arrived in Marrakesh the next day. Drake was fascinated by the acrobats, musicians and snake-charmers in the city's central square, Jeema al-Fna. Incredibly, the Stones were there, too. The group had now taken over the upper floors of the Es Saadi hotel, where Brian, Anita and Keith's love triangle was reaching its crescendo.

"We saw Cecil Beaton fannying around in a white hat, the Stones and the drummers in the main square," Charkin recalls. Later, he again approached the Stones on Drake's behalf. This time they agreed to an audience, which took place in what Charkin recalls as a café. "It seemed perfectly natural," he says. "Music was a big part of Nick's life. There was something about the way he played his guitar, more than his singing, that was utterly distinctive. Here was a business opportunity. He was slightly reluctant and shy. He sang and played some covers, the singing accompanying the guitar more than the other way round."

"It's extremely intimidating," contends Drake's biographer Richard Morton Jack. "You're confronted with Mick and Keith and their very cosmopolitan, bohemian entourage. It must have been like being shoved into an Egyptian Pharaoh's court. For Nick to have gone into a room with Mick and Keith and others, played some songs and to have impressed them – that's telling. How many unknown 18- or 19-year-old singer-guitarists would have had the cojones?

"Nick had such confidence that he was able to give an account of himself musically. I think the Moroccan trip was validating for him in that way. To be told by Mick and Keith, 'You're pretty good, son. Come and see us when you're back in London' – which is what they said to him – that must have been a big compliment." ➤

ROGER VIOLLET VIA GETTY IMAGES; CLARE SHILLAND; PAUL HUSBAND

A field in England: Drake in Selborne, Hampshire, 1967, after his return from Aix-en-Provence

Charkin offers a more contemporary take on why Drake took the Stones in his stride. "It was '67 and they were very famous – but they weren't gods like they are today, and they weren't that much older than us. Did the Stones seem part of the same youth culture as Nick and me? Yeah. Absolutely."

The students and the Stones settled down to eat, with the group offering "insider stories", as Nick wrote to his parents, perhaps beginning to imagine himself a regular fixture at rock's top tables. With the Stones entering their most decadent phase, one wonders exactly how debauched the meal was? "That's an exaggeration!" laughs Charkin. "We were all lusting after the unattainable Anita Pallenberg, but we were mainly drinking mint tea. I don't think we drank alcohol at all. I expect a couple of joints went round. It didn't feel decadent."

Drake and his friends set off for Chad, but disaster struck. "We turned the car over – another fuck-up, bugger it," says Charkin. "The main thing was it stopped us crossing the Sahara without a map!" The car was eventually repaired by Moroccans who mistook the four long-haired Englishmen for the Stones and Nick – for perhaps the only time in his life – for Mick Jagger. Finally, they limped back to Aix.

"His hair was longer and he had beard stubble," recalls Crocker, when he first re-encountered his friend back in France. "But we were closing up Résidence Sextius by then and I hardly saw him." Drake and his original companions drifted apart, no longer needing each other. "Nick went off on his own with the Etonian crowd, where more drugs became apparent," says Mason, who left in April.

© JULIAN LLOYD/BRIDGEMAN IMAGES; DANIEL WHEELER; HÖRDUR SVEINSSON; PHIL SHARP; GETTY IMAGES

ARDEN FANS

Five musicians share their love for Nick's music

PHILIP SELWAY, RADIOHEAD It's music that speaks to me, with that interplay between his voice, and this virtuosic but incredibly soulful playing on acoustic guitar. There is an innocence, and a transparency. It weaves into my own work. He isn't really a Radiohead influence, except for "Lozenge Of Love", which had that syncopated guitar and snaking melody.

STUART BRAITHWAITE, MOGWAI I'd never heard anything like *Pink Moon*: just Nick Drake, his acoustic and one line of piano, so minimal. There's something about it that showed me you don't have to bombard people with music to accomplish something better. It's really beautiful – sad, but oddly hopeful.

BRIDGET ST JOHN I loved *Bryter Layter*, which is really well produced, but *Pink Moon* is more like being in a room listening to him playing again. I can't read books about his illness written after the fact. I don't feel the same way about *Pink Moon* as they do. It's just very intimate and original. It's playing from the inside out.

JOE HENRY *Pink Moon* did something to me sonically, with just his voice and guitar, the tonality of his playing, the intimacy of his singing, the nuanced compositional voice of his melodies, its sparking intimacy and access to Nick Drake's beating heart. The sound of his guitar on that record is already speaking volumes.

JOHN GRANT I discovered Nick Drake when I first went to England in the late '90s, and responded to his beauty and melancholy. I responded to his story too, that he wasn't really celebrated when he was alive, was an introvert and had trouble performing live. I really identified with the type of person that he was. *Five Leaves Left* gets to me most.

There was one more significant event in Aix. On May 15, Drake sat in the kitchen of his friend James Calvocoressi and taped his current repertoire. This cassette survived and, amidst Jackson C Frank, Dylan and Jansch covers, features two Nick Drake originals. "Leaving Me Behind" demonstrates his sense of timing, where fast, finger-picking runs beneath slowly sung lyrics which decry such "*breakneck pace*" and warn: "*Success can be gained at too great a cost*". Meanwhile, the guitar lines of "Strange Meeting II" dance more; written on a trip to the coastal town of Cassis, it's a watery fantasia pursuing a mystical woman in "*forgotten dreams*".

Robin Frederick traces the songs begun in Aix to *Five Leaves Left*, with its lustrously warm, woody Robert Kirby arrangements and lyrics of courtly resignation. "That trip to Morocco loosened up something in him," she says. "Then he comes back and does his own songs. 'Three Hours' [*inspired by his friendship with Jeremy Mason*] is from then, 'The Thoughts Of Mary Jane' may have been based on me. You hear a North African rhythm on 'Leaving Me Behind'. Whatever he needed to digest emotionally, in terms of 'Am I ready to do this?', by the time he comes back from Aix to England, he's ready. That's the fulcrum right there."

THE friends who started 1967 with Nick Drake ran into him occasionally in the years that followed. Richard Charkin was a fellow student in Cambridge. "We'd go to the Criterion pub," he says. "'River Deep, Mountain High' was the backdrop, with Golden Virginia tobacco nestled in the ashtrays. He had rooms with a big bay window, where he'd roll joints on album covers. He'd played covers in Marrakesh, but it was his own stuff in Cambridge."

The release of *Five Leaves Left* by Island Records on July 3, 1969 was greeted with pride. "When I heard it, it wasn't like, 'Christ, where did that come from?'" smiles Crocker. "I knew where it came from." It came from Aix.

"That first album's full of dappled sunsets and optimism," says Mason. "This English pastoral. Then Nick's songs got darker, filled with drugs and disappointment."

Mason and Crocker watched with concern as Nick Drake's career faltered and faded, hampered by declining mental health. Each remembers their final meeting with their former schoolfriend. "It was in his flat in Battersea," says Mason. "There was nothing in it, except the cardboard boxes his hi-fi came in. He was a bit spaced out by then and very disappointed that his music wasn't acknowledged. We did finally at the end of the evening kind of get back to where we were."

By 1974, Crocker had become a musician's manager. "I heard from mutual friends that Nick hadn't been well," he says. "So I left a note at Island. About three months later, he rang. I said, 'Why not come round for tea?' But he wasn't the Nick I knew. He was disconnected and finding it difficult to talk. I said to him, 'Nick, is there anything I can do to help?' He said, 'I don't know. I don't think anyone can help me, really.' It stayed with me for a long time."

"The only reason I kick against 'doomed youth' is that I don't think Nick would like that," concludes Mason. "I gather that on his final night he played a record that we played together, *The Brandenburg Concertos*. I would like to think that it reminded him of our time in Aix. A time of some happiness."

My Back Pages by Richard Charkin is published by Marble Hill

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Shadow players: Noah Lennox (left) and Pete 'Sonic' Kember

CAL MOORES

PANDA BEAR & SONIC BOOM

Band On The Wall, Manchester, April 19

Two staunch psychedelic explorers bring their great *Reset* to the masses

THE breezy guitar strum of Eddie Cochran's "Three Steps To Heaven" is not a sound you'd instantly associate with two men renowned for taking drugs to make music to take drugs to. However, it's the first thing you hear as Spacemen 3's Sonic Boom (Pete Kember) and Animal Collective's Panda Bear (Noah Lennox) step onto the stage in near darkness and tap into their samplers.

Kember fell back in love with doo-wop and classic rock'n'roll a few years ago when he moved house and was able to access his full vinyl collection again. Sampling some of those records formed the basis of the pair's 2022 collaboration *Reset*, created during lockdown in Portugal where they both live, having remained friends and collaborators since Kember produced Panda Bear's 2011 album *Tomboy*. On stage, they stand behind individual stations with modest set-ups of synths, samplers and various percussive items as trippy visuals unfold behind them, moving from kaleidoscopic bursts of bouncing bright colours through to expressive animations, such as a dancing, melting ice sculpture.

Sticking to *Reset*'s running order, opener "Gettin' To The Point"

Although the pair remain motionless, they present music full of momentum

marries that looped sample of Cochran's unmistakable guitar with syrupy electronics, melodic harmonies and a heavy dose of gut-wobbling sub-bass that results in a buoyant beginning. "Go On", which samples "Give It To Me" by The Troggs, is amped up live. The sweet, sprightly melodic skip of the recorded version feels a little harder and almost more menacing, taking on a Suicide-esque throb with a spirited vocal yelp from Lennox. With Kember on vocals for the wonderfully woozy "Everyday", his voice drops several registers lower, almost recalling the deep rumblings of The Magnetic Fields' Stephin Merritt.

Despite the vibrancy of the music and the visuals, *Reset* was very much a record born from isolation and fear during lockdown. Its colourful, exuberant exterior masked darker lyrical themes that expressed a deep cynicism about the state of the world. "Edge Of The Edge", which samples the 1963 doo-wop track "Denise" by Randy & The Rainbows, is perhaps the most perfect example of the pair burying the weight of the world's problems within bright, infectious and quietly euphoric music. Although it contains lyrics such as "*sick as a dog and you're diggin' through the trash*" and "*it's forever at the push of a button*" – a likely a nod to the new nuclear threat posed by Putin – the latter line is delivered with such melodic flair that it never feels anything other than perversely triumphant when sung. Lennox's voice is constantly rising up to hit melodic highs, while Kember dips back down into his latter-day Iggy Pop register to create the impression of a doo-wop harmony group.

By engaging with this '50s and '60s music, the pair create a dialogue with music history in real time. It's a back-and-forth conversation, filtered through the pair's distinct voices, that uses the foundation of rock and pop as a springboard to leap into future experimentations. There's an almost eerie element to hearing music that is often so clean, pure and naive merged with throbbing bass and coated in warped electronics and manipulated melodies. But it's a marriage that works remarkably well. If anything, what the pair set out to achieve on record feels more fully realised live, with details enhanced, the grooves more pronounced and textures more tangible.

Their commitment to crafting joy from turbulence extends to a series of carnivalesque flourishes. The use of a güiro, common in Latin American music, adds a lively and almost tropical percussive touch, while another contraption makes the almost comically jolly sound of a party whistle. This provides a curious contrast with the obvious reserve of Kember and Lennox themselves, who remain solid statues behind their stations, with talk never extended beyond a customary "thank you".

The action on stage is remarkably uneventful, but although the pair remain motionless, they present music full of momentum. After a slight fumble, the endlessly pulsing "Everything's Been Leading To This" grows more intense and thunderous until it reaches a place – complete with intensely flashing strobes – that could only be described as 'like a techno Beach Boys'. It's a thrilling, clattering end to the main set.

The pair return to "play some oldies". Sadly this doesn't mean any Spacemen 3 or Animal Collective material, but there's a handful of Panda Bear's solo tunes, such as "Comfy In Nautica" and deep cut "The Preakness", which locks into a blissful and dreamy groove. However, it's actually Kember's 2020 Sonic Boom track "Things Like This (A Little Bit Deeper)" that provides the encore's high point. With his vocals heavily processed, he seems less fearful of the odd bum note and really leans into his singing, resulting in a genuinely impassioned and emotive performance. It's a joy to be sucked into the song's repetitive refrain and become lost in its thick sonic fog.

In what proves to be a very neat bookend, a finale of Panda Bear's "Bros" closes proceedings just as the night began: with layered samples of strummed acoustic guitars, sugary melodies and enough sub-bass to make your teeth rattle.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY

SETLIST

1 Gettin' To The Point
2 Go On
3 Everyday
4 Edge Of The Edge
5 In My Body
6 Whirlpool
7 Danger
8 Livin' In The After
9 Everything's Been Leading To This

ENCORE

10 Comfy In Nautica
11 Just A Little Piece Of Me
12 Things Like This (A little Bit Deeper)
13 The Preakness
14 Bros

Sonic et lumière: Panda Bear takes the mic

CAL MOORES

For a reason: Daniel O'Sullivan and Charles Bullen

LIFETONES

Café Oto, London, April 15

"Time goes a bit weird" as This Heat's Charles Bullen revives his other band

THERE'S something different about the energy at Café Oto this evening. As the venue slowly fills to capacity, there are young children moving among the crowd of experimental music connoisseurs. When one of them grabs the microphone, it seems like a transgression of this generally reverential place. That is until he says, "Will you please welcome... Charles Bullen!"

If this weekend's Lifetones residency has the vibe of a family affair, then Bullen – a tall and thin sixtysomething with the appearance of a guerrilla leader – is its patriarch. Once of This Heat, first-wave post-punkers influential enough to have been mentioned in LCD Soundsystem's "Losing My Edge", his guitar deconstructions and plaintive vocals presided over a mysterious British musical space somewhere between *Rock Bottom* and *Unknown Pleasures*. There was improvisation and noise, but also cats with "heavy vibes".

Bullen plays his first set of this evening bent over a prepared guitar on which he creates a mood by tapping gently, summoning gong-like chimes, an echoing urban gamelan. As the piece develops, he plays with a slide, which serves as a kind of editing tool to mark transitions in the mesmerising expanse of the music. When he concludes after perhaps half an hour, he seems uncertain if he's played for too long or not long enough. "Time goes a bit weird when you're doing that," he says.

Time's unpredictable nature is not irrelevant here. When This Heat split in 1982, they scattered even more deeply into underground activity. Drummer Charles Hayward played in Camberwell Now and became a stalwart of the improv scene. Gareth Williams (the band's bassist, who died in 2001) made impressionistic work with Mary Currie as Flaming Tunes. Bullen, meanwhile, further embraced dub reggae and formed Lifetones with his neighbour, Julius Samuel, latterly Dub Judah.

Imagine Keith Levene channelling Jerry Garcia

Forty years on, a slowly unfolding series of events (Light In The Attic's reissues of the This Heat catalogue and the sole Lifetones album *For A Reason*; the This Is Not This Heat shows of 2016–19) now lead us to a reprise for Lifetones themselves. These days the band is not a duo but a six-piece, and draws on a tight dubwise rhythm section (bassist Caius Williams and drummer Frank Byng) along with keyboard player Charles Stuart and viola player Rose Keeler-Schaffeler. The considerable skills of Daniel O'Sullivan on busy rhythm guitar underline the melody beneath the dub atmospheres.

The musical rapport between O'Sullivan – the kids seem to be his – and Bullen helps give the show a warmth and immediacy beyond its nostalgic remit. Of course, there is a celebratory aspect here: standout tracks from the album like "For A Reason" and "Good Side" are particularly strong, but the intricacies of a dub like "Decide" are just as enthralling. Guitar people often note the spiritual relationship between Television and Fairport Convention, but Bullen's free-roaming soloing – imagine Keith Levene channelling Jerry Garcia – suggests a similar musical exploration in post-punk's treeless terrain.

SETLIST

1. For A Reason
2. Decide
3. Bike
4. Good Side
5. Travelling
6. Equinox
7. Gareth
8. Distance No Object
9. Radium

The collective mood peaks with the lively "Distance No Object", but the evening also succeeds in honouring the wider intrigue of Lifetones and their orbit. At one point Mary Currie joins the band with a small harmonium to perform a Flaming Tunes song. A particularly good moment is the elliptical "Travelling", which throws back to This Heat – we're talking modal excursions, elliptical lyrics, communing with a mound of ruins. It's all made stranger by Bullen and O'Sullivan's twin vocals.

The last song of the evening is "Radium", very much in keeping with what we've been listening to so far, but announced as the first new Bullen song in 35 years. It suggests that, four decades on, his timeline still has some surprises left.

JOHN ROBINSON

BRADFORD BAILEY

END OF WORLD UK TOUR SEPTEMBER 2023

11 **SWANSEA** PATTI PAVILION
12 **MARGATE** DREAMLAND
13 **LINCOLN** THE ENGINE SHED
15 **BLACKBURN** KING GEORGE'S HALL
16 **BUCKLEY** THE TIVOLI
18 **SUNDERLAND** THE FIRE STATION
19 **ABERDEEN** BEACH BALLROOOM
21 **EDINBURGH** O_2 ACADEMY
22 **MANCHESTER** O_2 RITZ
23 **HOLMFIRTH** THE PICTUREDROME
25 **COVENTRY** HMV EMPIRE
26 **BRIGHTON** CHALK
28 **BRISTOL** O_2 ACADEMY
29 **TORQUAY** THE FOUNDRY
30 **LONDON** O_2 FORUM KENTISH TOWN

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SUN 26th BIRMINGHAM
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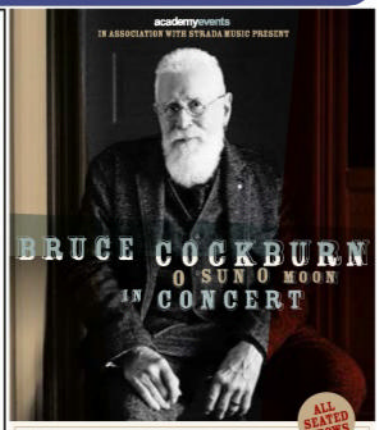

ALL SEATED SHOWS

AUGUST 2023
THU 24TH OXFORD O_2 ACADEMY
FRI 25TH LONDON O_2 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE

FILMS

Ari Aster's clever-clever fever dream; a Brit murder-mystery to dye for; fig-picking teens in Tunisia...

Schlemiel deal: Joaquin Phoenix in *Beau Is Afraid*

BEAU IS AFRAID Following the knockout one-two of *Hereditary* (2018) followed by *Midsommar* (2019), the most immaculately disturbing films of the 21st century, stakes were high for Ari Aster's third – especially when word got out that it was going to be three hours long, feature a vast A-list cast, and was wryly described by the director as a "Jewish *Lord Of The Rings*".

Beau Is Afraid as it finally emerges may be many things: the longest Jewish mother joke ever told; a lurid and epic therapy session; and perhaps the most eccentric major release since *Southland Tales*. What's without doubt is that it's going to confound the hell out of any audience willing to stick with its full 179 minutes.

Joaquin Phoenix plays Beau – a schlumpy midlife schlemiel, living in a parodically dystopian American city, seeking medication from his long-suffering therapist ahead of a birthday visit to his fearsome but beloved mother. But his trip home is frustrated by a series of surreal interventions: his keys and luggage are stolen while he packs; his apartment is invaded by venomous spiders and street people; he's violently attacked by a naked serial killer; he's hit by a car and rescued by a serenely sinister husband and wife; he stumbles into the woods and chances upon a troupe of wandering minstrels...

It all unfurls like an extravagantly detailed anxiety dream, and you're likely to recognise at least one scene from your own litany of night terrors. Aster seems to be swinging for the big leagues – aiming to create a sensationally visionary masterpiece on the level of *Mulholland Drive* or *I'm Thinking Of Ending Things*. But where Lynch and Kaufman's fever dreams are driven by their own internal oneiric logic, Aster still feels too much of a precocious film nerd, determined more to impress with his cleverness than to ever really seduce the viewer. At times, when every frame feels as stuffed as an old *Mad* magazine comic with cute in-jokes and references, it feels like Woody Allen attempting Buñuel.

Beau... was originally titled 'Disappointment Blvd', and that the working title was always too much of a hostage to critics. On some level you have to applaud such an extravagantly demented flight of fancy. But you can't help but hope that, having got all this clever-clever kvetching off his chest, Aster delivers some films more worthy of his undoubted talents.

MEDUSA DELUXE One of the immediate pleasures of AI chatbots was commanding them to sketch out unlikely commissions: an episode of *Friends* in the style of Samuel Beckett; *The Wire* as scripted by PG Wodehouse. On the face of it you could describe *Medusa Deluxe*, the sensational feature debut from British director Thomas Hardiman, as a Christopher Guest film directed in the style of the Alan Clarke of *Elephant*. Or maybe a Robert Altman movie scripted by Johnny Vegas.

But the unlikely formulas don't come close to capturing the immense charm of this ravishing ensemble piece. On the eve of a bitterly contested regional hairdressing competition, one of the star snippers, Mosca, is discovered dead and scalped. Suspicion lingers around many of the major players: the talented loose cannon Cleve (played with unhinged gusto by Clare Perkins); the beleaguered organiser Rene (played by Darrell D'Silva as a cross between *The Fast Show*'s Swiss Toni and *Zoolander*'s Jacob Mugatu) and the mysterious security guard known only as "Gac". The plot, taking in Pantene Pro V, corruption and lies proves as intricate as a Ghanaian braid. In a funny way it's a kind of bitter British Rian Johnson whodunnit: 'Scissors Out'.

It could have easily erred into camp frothiness – and to be fair, the dialogue is frequently irresistible ("Do you mind? I'm in the middle of a Georgian fontange!"). But Hardiman's comedy is ultimately rooted in richly observed characters and their fierce commitment to sculpting the "crowns we never take off". Building to a memorable and surprisingly moving climax, *Medusa Deluxe* is an absolute treat.

UNDER THE FIG TREES French-Tunisian director Erige Sehiri's previous film was a

REVIEWED THIS MONTH

BEAU IS AFRAID
Directed by Ari Aster
Starring Joaquin Phoenix, Patti LuPone, Parker Posey
Opens 19 May
Cert 15
7/10

MEDUSA DELUXE
Directed by Thomas Hardiman
Starring Clare Perkins, Kayla Meikle, Darret D'Silva
Opens 8 June
Cert 15
9/10

UNDER THE FIG TREES
Directed by Erige Sehiri
Starring Fide Fdhili, Feten Fdhili, Ameni Fdhili
Opens 19 May
Cert To be confirmed
8/10

REALITY
Directed by Tina Satter
Starring Sydney Sweeney, Marchant Davis, Josh Hamilton
Opens 2 June
Cert To be confirmed
7/10

AMANDA
Directed by Carolina Cavallii
Starring Benedetta Porcaroli, Galatea Bellugi, Giovanna Mezzogiorno
Opens 2 June
Cert 15
7/10

conscientious, enlightening documentary about the lives of railway workers in the north of Tunisia, negotiating post-colonial corruption and natural wonder. By contrast, *Under The Fig Trees*, her fiction debut, though similarly rooted in the economic realities of Tunisian life, feels like a lark – as blithe and sun-dappled as Renoir's *Partie De Campagne*.

A crew of teenage girls and a couple of boys arrive every day by truck for their summer holiday job, harvesting figs on a Tunisian orchard. It's hard, delicate, exacting work, for a pitiless boss, but the kids – untrained actors, largely improvising dialogue – find time to gossip, flirt, tease and joke in the shadows of the trees. The girls are wearing headscarves (though the hijab is no longer enforced in Tunisia) and talking in Arabic, but with their shy, expressive, darting looks, frequent laughter, boy chat and discussions of the politics of sharing selfies on Instagram, they could be teenagers in Kilmarnock or Caracas. It's a welcome, humane reminder of what we share across cultures, at a time when politicians seem determined to highlight only resolute otherness.

Beau's trip home is frustrated by a series of surreal interventions

REALITY Reality Winner may feel like the name of a loutish anti-heroine in a late-period Martin Amis novel, but was in fact the twentysomething Texan whistleblower who leaked intelligence about Russian interference in the 2016 US election and received a five-year prison sentence. Director Tina Satter located the audio recording of the FBI's arrest and interrogation of Winner and in 2019 transformed it into a piece of uncanny off-Broadway theatre, using the verbatim dialogue to dramatise bureaucratic absurdity in the age of Trump.

Bringing her own play to the screen isn't a complete success. Compared with the artifice of a theatrical staging, the daylit, flat effect of the film feels drab, and the FBI agents seem to teeter on the edge of playing for laughs – the banality of evil as played by a Steve Carrell character in khaki chinos and a bad line in pet patter. But Sydney Sweeney – last seen as a discontented teen in *White Lotus* – is a revelation as Winner herself, a bright, patriotic crossfit enthusiast, who gradually realises she's stumbled into the realms of geopolitical intrigue.

AMANDA Following *The Worst Person In The World* and *Sick Of Myself*, *Amanda* is this month's offering of European twentysomething female disaffection, this time from writer-director-novelist Carolina Cavalli, something like the Italian Miranda July. Following an unsatisfying spell studying in Paris, the eponymous heroine returns to her family's swanky villa to find herself adrift in adult life, without a career, friends or a boyfriend. She determines to reconnect with her last real pal, the daughter of her mother's best friend, with whom she romped as a two-year old toddler.

It's a quirky, resolutely offbeat picture, at times like a long lost Hal Hartley curio or a Greta Gerwig vehicle directed by Yorgos Lanthimos, but it's carried by the unmissable Benedetta Porcaroli (previously the lead in Netflix's *Baby*) as Amanda, a defiantly deadpan oddball in the worst crocheted waistcoat in Turin. ***STEPHEN TROUSSÉ***

Hair-raising: Kae Alexander (left) and Kayla Meikle in *Medusa Deluxe*

ALSO OUT...

ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME, MARGARET
MAY 19
Rachel McAdams, Benny Safdie and Kathy Bates star in Kelly Fremon Craig's winning adaptation of Judy Blume's classic coming-of-age novel.

MASTER GARDENER
MAY 26
Writer-director Paul Schrader takes a pastoral turn with a curious tale of the rehabilitative effects of horticulture on former neo-Nazis, starring Joel Edgerton and Sigourney Weaver.

Sisu

SISU
MAY 26
Grizzled Finnish prospector Aatami Korpi likes looking for gold nuggets and butchering Nazis – and he's all out of gold in this bloody but fun action movie set in the 1944 Lapland War.

SPIDER-MAN: ACROSS THE SPIDER-VERSE
JUNE 2
The original Spider-Verse movie was a sensational, funny, unlikely gem from the extended Marvel universe. The much-anticipated sequel finds Miles Morales reconvening his Spider-buddies to tackle the threat of interdimensional nogoodnik The Spot.

WAR PONY
JUNE 9
Directorial debut from Elvis's granddaughter Riley Keough shines a light on the lives of Native American teens growing up on a South Dakota reservation.

LOVE WITHOUT WALLS
JUNE 9
A young couple fall into homelessness in Southend in this compelling drama starring Irish singer-songwriter Niall McNamee and Shana Swash (best known as teen mum Demi in *EastEnders*).

DELVON LAMARR ORGAN TRIO

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MON 15 MAY	LIVERPOOL	THE CAVERN
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WED 17 MAY	MANCHESTER	NIGHT AND DAY
THU 18 MAY	NEWCASTLE	THE CLUNY
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TUE 23 MAY
LIVERPOOL
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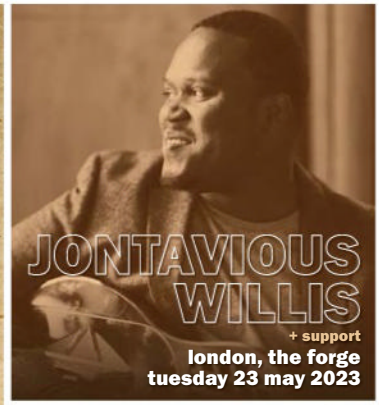
WED 24 MAY
BRISTOL
THE FLEECE

THU 25 MAY
BRIGHTON
PATTERNS



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Friday 23 June **Edinburgh Liquid Room**	*Wednesday 28 June* **Norwich Epic Studios**	*Saturday 01 July* **London Islington Assembly Hall**	

london **the forge**
20th & 21st June 2023

LONDON THE FORGE
THURSDAY 10TH &
FRIDAY 11TH AUGUST 2023

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Thu 19 Oct - Liverpool, The Cavern
Fri 20 Oct - Leeds, Brudenell Social Club
Sat 21 Oct - Sheffield, Leadmill
Fri 27 Oct - Southampton, The Brook
Sat 28 Oct - Cardiff, The Globe
Fri 03 Nov - Birmingham, The Crossing
Sat 04 Nov - Manchester, Rebellion
Fri 10 Nov - Shoreham-by-Sea, The Ropetackle
Sat 11 Nov - Guildford, The Holroyd
Fri 17 Nov - Edinburgh, Voodoo Rooms
Sat 18 Nov - Glasgow, Oran Mor
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Sat 25 Nov - Gillingham, The Great Hall

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FRIDAY 20 OCTOBER BRIGHTON PATTERNS	FRIDAY 10 NOVEMBER LIVERPOOL HANGAR 34
SATURDAY 21 OCTOBER NORWICH WATERFRONT STUDIO	SATURDAY 11 NOVEMBER BIRMINGHAM THE CROSSING
FRIDAY 27 OCTOBER EXETER PHOENIX	FRIDAY 24 NOVEMBER LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL
SATURDAY 28 OCTOBER SOUTHAMPTON 1865	SATURDAY 25 NOVEMBER LONDON ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL

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Without the band: Ottilie Patterson on tour in Germany, November 1957

MY NAME IS OTTILIE

IPLAYER

8/10

Fascinating documentary on the godmother of British blues. *By John Lewis*

EVEN those who consider themselves aficionados of British popular music of the '50s and '60s might not be familiar with Ottilie Patterson, but for a few years – between the Suez Crisis and the rise of The Beatles – she was the biggest live draw on the London scene, a homegrown singer possessed of a soaring blues voice that seem to have been beamed in from a different space and time. This excellent BBC documentary, presented by the African-American blues singer Dana Masters and using previously unheard interview footage, attempts to restore her reputation.

Born in rural Ulster, Ottilie Patterson came to London in 1954, aged 22, having saved up £21 from her job as an art teacher, and quickly started to earn a reputation as the finest blues singer on these islands, something she'd picked up from Bessie Smith and Jelly Roll Morton records. She would have made a great rock or blues howler, but rock'n'roll and R&B had barely taken off in America, let alone Britain, and it was the trad jazz scene that embraced her. In 1955 she joined Chris Barber's band, marrying him in 1959.

As many of the commentators on this documentary observe – including Pretty Things guitarist Dick Taylor, Jools Holland and singer Cleo Sylvestre – the boundaries between trad jazz, skiffle, Brit-blues and rock'n'roll were porous, and Patterson's extraordinary voice inspired musicians in all camps: Robert Plant was transformed by seeing Patterson duet with Sister Rosetta Tharpe, while the Yardbirds backed her for several live dates. But, aside from a 1960 album of Irish folk songs and a remarkable 1969 album of whimsical psychedelia (both unmentioned here), Patterson largely stayed within the increasingly uncool sphere of Barber's trad band.

Beyond the music is a tragic human story. Barber got Patterson pregnant while he was still married to his first wife, the Anglo-Ghanaian singer and dancer Naida Lane and – faced with what would have been a major scandal at the time – he forced Patterson to have an abortion.

While marriage to Barber gave Patterson a degree of respectability and protection, it also gave her less artistic independence. Exhausted by the demands of touring and clearly suffering from psychiatric issues, she started dropping out of music in the mid-1960s, faded from public memory and became a (sometimes literal) footnote in British jazz history.

The notion of white Brits singing "black" has a complex history – in 1962, Philip Larkin, in his role as the *Telegraph*'s jazz critic, dismissed British R&B as being "as anomalous as British sherry". Within a year or two it had become the norm for countless British Invasion bands; it later became slightly derided for its pointless fidelity; more recently it has been dubbed "cultural appropriation". Masters says that actual musicians rarely judge music in such socio-political terms; Patterson herself addressed the issue in an archive interview, talking about her live engagements in America. "It didn't seem to bother black people when they heard me sing, because they were listening for something else, something beyond the accent," she said. Listening to those electrifying performances, you can hear so many layers in Patterson's voice: a mischievous, hiccuping bubble; a fizz of joy; a touch of sardonic Ulster Scots; and what she herself described as a "deep blues melancholy".

JASON ISBELL RUNNING WITH OUR EYES CLOSED

HBO MAX

9/10

A candid chronicle of love, music, and grammar

Directed by Sam Jones (*I Am Trying To Break Your Heart: A Film About Wilco*), *Running With Our Eyes Closed* opens with Jason Isbell and wife/collaborator Amanda Shires arguing about past versus present participles, which gradually escalates into a rift that threatens their marriage. Ostensibly about the making of 2020's *Reunions*, this moving doc is more concerned with how its subject transforms his family, his alcoholism, his tenure with the Drive-By Truckers, and his Alabama upbringing into unflinching country-rock songs.

STEPHEN DEUSNER

NEVER BE A PUNCHING BAG FOR NOBODY

FESTIVALS

7/10

The former Galaxie 500 bassist peers into Boston's forgotten corners

Naomi Yang of Damon & Naomi proves her mettle as a filmmaker with this deeply personal look at East Boston's hidden histories. A boxing gym becomes a symbol of the resilience of people and places facing erasure from gentrification. Most affecting are Yang's reflections on the violence in her family growing up and the lessons she learns in that humble gym about claiming space and punching back.

JASON ANDERSON

THE PASSIONATE STRANGER

STUDIOCANAL

7/10

Pioneering filmmaker gets her due

It speaks volumes about unconscious sexism that even keen cineastes can remain unacquainted with Muriel Box – the UK's most prolific female director and the first woman to win the Best Original Screenplay Oscar (for 1946 melodrama *The Seventh Veil*). The rediscovery continues with 4K restorations of three comedies, all highlighting the experience of women and prodding social matters: the playful portmanteau *The Truth About Women* (1957); the kitchen-sink *Rattle Of A Simple Man* (1964); and this gem, a satire on romance novels that sets layers of reality (black and white) and fiction (vibrating colour) in complex collision. **Extras: 8/10.** Docs and interviews exploring Box's career.

DAMIEN LOVE

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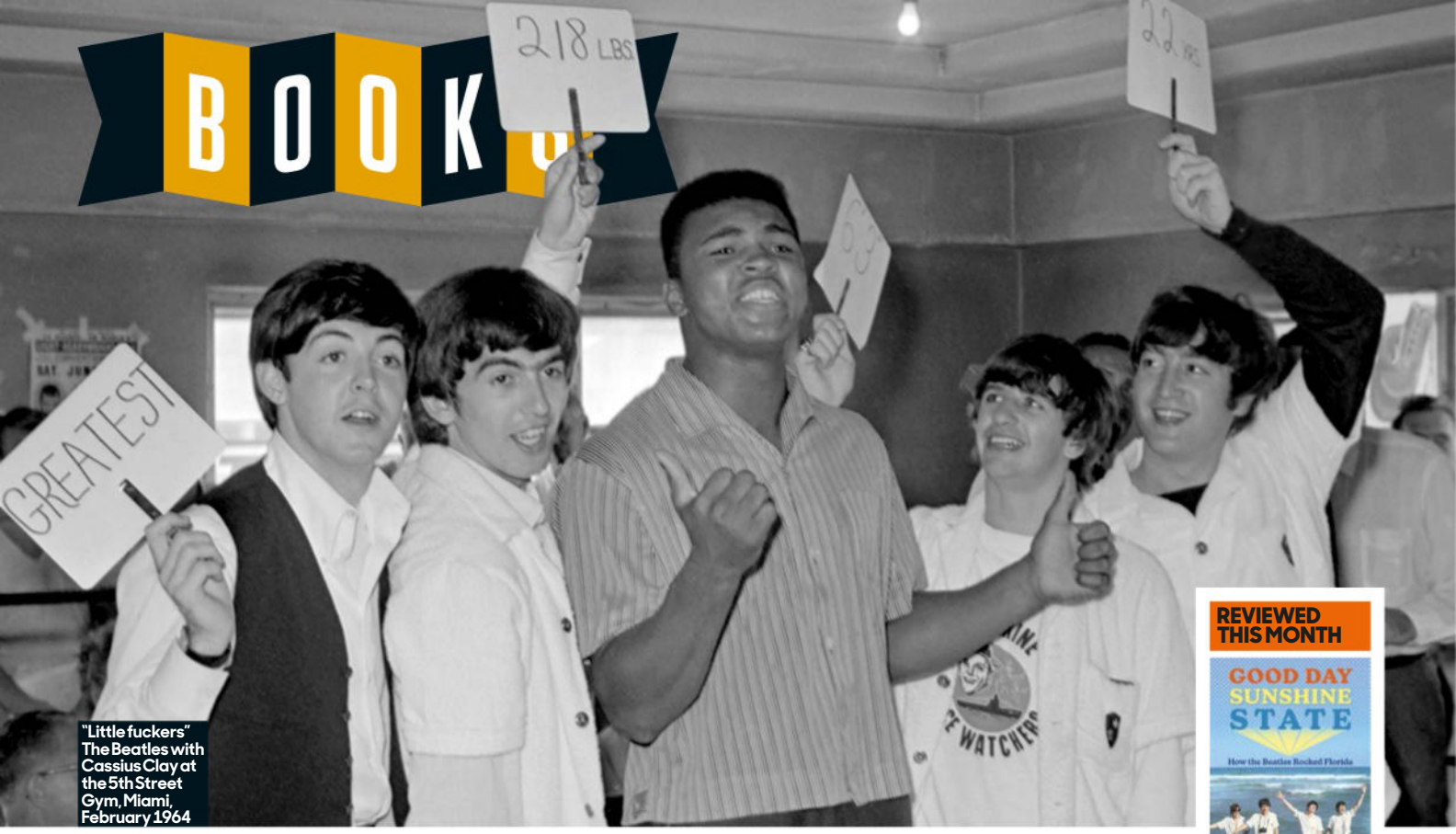
BOOKS



"Little fuckers" The Beatles with Cassius Clay at the 5th Street Gym, Miami, February 1964

HOW do you solve a problem like The Beatles? When everything is known and understood, what can you do to recapture the moment of impact, that blinding flash where novelty and inevitability collide to make history? On the face of it, Florida seems a strange place to look. However, in **Good Day Sunshine State**, Emmy-winning broadcast journalist Bob Kealing – who previously explored the Southern roots of Gram Parsons in his 2015 book *Calling Me Home* – has identified a few weeks in 1964 as a transition point, both for the band and for pop culture as a whole.

In February 1964, The Beatles travelled to Miami Beach to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show* for the second time. Their first appearance, a week earlier in New York, had been a triumph. After three flop singles in the US, Beatlemania was suddenly a thing, but pop success of this kind was an unknown quantity. Sections of the US media still referred to the group as "mopheads". As he waited at Gate 1B of JFK airport to board the plane to Miami, Paul McCartney was observed by Joe Monteleone, a ramp agent for National Airlines, snapping away with a camera. He took pictures of the floor, the wall, the dirty windows, the plane. Monteleone asked him why. "In case this bubble bursts tomorrow," McCartney replied. "I want to remember every step of it."

Kealing suggests that the ascent of The Beatles offered relief from the dark mood which had enveloped the US after the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963. He also ties them in with the Civil Rights movement, because of the group's contractual insistence on never playing to segregated audiences.

His sources come from outside the Beatles camp, adjacent observers offering reflective testimony on a moment when The Beatles were not yet fully draped in myth. Most notably there is Louis "Buddy" Dresner, the police sergeant who was assigned to provide security and had to improvise, smuggling The Beatles around Miami Beach inside laundry baskets. *New York Times* reporter Robert Lipsyte, in town to follow Cassius Clay (not yet known as Muhammad Ali), found himself locked in a room with The Beatles as they waited for the boxer to arrive. Lipsyte suggests that the subsequent photo-opp in which Clay/Ali toys with The Beatles marks the beginning of the 1960s, and of pop culture, though this was not evident at the time. "Who were those little fuckers?" Clay asked the reporter afterwards.

AS the founding editor of *Uncut*, Allan Jones will need no introduction to readers of this magazine. His 2017 book *Can't Stand Up For Falling Down* was a hilarious compendium of rock'n'roll anecdotes which began life as his back page column, Stop Me If You've Heard This One Before. The sequel, **Too Late To Stop Now**, is more than just more of the same. The old-school drinking and industrial drug abuse remain, as does the author's decisive indiscretion (eg, Bryan Ferry's head emerging "from a tastefully patterned earthenware dish piled high with cocaine"), but many of the chapters unfold at greater length, leaving room for more nuanced reflection on the consequences of all the excessive ribaldry, and even – on occasion – some facts.

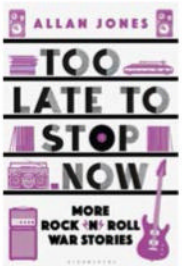
The chapter on Elvis Costello is seriously informative; Oliver Stone explains himself intricately; and a four-year pursuit of Jerry Dammers provides an encyclopaedic account of the early years of 2 Tone. Jones's reliable sparring partner Lou Reed offers an unmatchable demolition of *Metal Machine Music* ("It's total gibberish, from start to finish"); not to be outdone, John Cale delivers a potted history of The Velvet Underground. But mostly, there is comedy. Captain Sensible sets Jones's hair alight on the road to Middlesbrough. Hacks "fall upon the bar like jackals on a wounded gnu". Ian Anderson "gives me a look like he's just noticed half my face is missing". Sting "scans the room, a U-boat commander at a periscope". It's ridiculous fun, like PG Wodehouse directed by Sam Peckinpah.

WHEN he first hears of Connie Converse, Howard Fishman suspects that her identity may be a "hipster marketing ploy" like John Lurie's Marvin Pontiac, a fictional musician whose fabled life gave depth to his music. But Converse was real, and while fragments of her music remain, details of her life are – at first – scant, apart from the fact that she wrote a series of notes to friends and family in 1974, before driving her VW Beetle into obscurity.

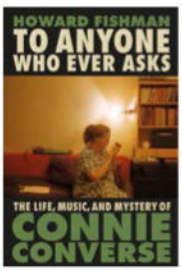
In **To Anyone Who Ever Asks**, Fishman makes bold claims for Converse's music. He places her alongside Bob Dylan in the cold January of 1961, suggesting that fate could have chosen either one of them for immortality. The spartan formality of Converse's songs don't quite support such boasts. She is made interesting by the scarcity of information, so while Fishman's biographical crate-digging uncovers a haunting picture of a troubled life, it may not necessarily advance the cause of her music. ***ALASTAIR McKAY***

REVIEWED THIS MONTH

GOOD DAY SUNSHINE STATE: HOW THE BEATLES ROCKED FLORIDA
BOB KEALING
UNIVERSITY PRESS OF FLORIDA, £29
8/10



TOO LATE TO STOP NOW: MORE ROCK'N'ROLL WAR STORIES
ALLAN JONES
BLOOMSBURY, £17
9/10



TO ANYONE WHO EVER ASKS: THE LIFE, MUSIC, AND MYSTERY OF CONNIE CONVERSE
HOWARD FISHMAN
WILDFIRE, £25
7/10

MARK AND COLLEEN HAYWARD/GETTY IMAGES

Not Fade Away

Fondly remembered this month...

SEYMOUR STEIN

Sire Records visionary

(1942–2023)

ONE of Talking Heads' fondest memories was of Seymour Stein exuberantly singing one of their songs during a breakneck taxi ride across New York City. "He was our champion," they wrote. "Some people can spot a diamond in the rough and Seymour was one of them."

As co-founder of Sire Records, Stein offered to sign Talking Heads in 1975 on the strength of one show. He was prepared to wait another year for them to agree. A similar scenario played out with the Ramones. Tipped off by his wife Linda, who'd seen them at CBGB the night before, Stein auditioned the band in June '75. They eventually joined the label seven months later. Both episodes served to illustrate Stein's tenacity when it came to business, alongside his sheer enthusiasm and impeccable taste, despite griping that "radio stations wouldn't touch the Ramones with a toilet brush".

An avid music fan, he'd begun as a junior clerk at *Billboard* in 1958, followed by short spells at King and Red Bird Records in the early '60s. In 1966 he teamed up with songwriter-producer Richard Gottehrer to form Sire, its moniker drawn from a merger of their first names. The pair began by licensing European rock bands, landing their first major hit in 1973 with "Hocus Pocus", by Dutch outfit Focus.

Seymour Stein and his wife Linda with Iggy Pop and the Ramones at CBGB, NYC, April 1976

Gottehrer's departure two years later caused Stein to scour his home turf for raw talent. Aside from Talking Heads and the Ramones, his new acquisitions included Dead Boys and Richard Hell & The Voidoids. When Sire became a subsidiary of Warner Bros in the late '70s, Stein expanded his reach in the US, eventually overseeing artists like Depeche Mode, The Pretenders and Echo & The Bunnymen. His most successful charge was Madonna; Stein was so eager for her signature that he finalised the deal while hospitalised with a heart complaint in 1982.

He went on to become vice president of Warner Bros, staying until his retirement in 2018. His core philosophy remained constant throughout the years. "Being liked was not my goal in life," he wrote in his memoir, *Siren Song*. "My business was turning great music into hit records."

HARRY BELAFONTE

Calypso king

(1927–2023)

Harry Belafonte achieved superstar status by popularising Caribbean music during the '50s. Third album *Calypso* (1956), featuring "Jamaica Farewell" and signature tune "Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)", became the first million-seller by a solo artist in the States. A fine stage and film actor, he was also a leading activist for humanitarian causes and civil rights, helping organise 1963's March On Washington and the subsequent Selma to Montgomery marches. In 1985 he put together the all-star "We Are The World" single for Ethiopian famine relief.

RAY SHULMAN

Gentle Giant

(1949–2023)

Alongside elder brothers Derek and Phil, multi-instrumentalist Ray Shulman co-founded Simon Dupree And The Big Sound in 1966, the trio forming prog rockers Gentle Giant four years later. Ray was a prominent writer throughout their decade-long run of albums, after which he produced The Sugarcubes, AR Kane, The Sundays and Ian McCulloch.

'SWEET' CHARLES SHERRELL

JB's bassist

(1943–2023)

Taught guitar by Curtis Mayfield, Sherrell passed through Aretha Franklin's backing group prior to joining James Brown's band in 1968. Renowned for his innovative thumping style of playing, his on-off tenure with Brown lasted until 1996, encompassing key successes like "Say It Loud" and "Mother Popcorn".

KEITH REID

Procol Harum lyricist

(1946–2023)

Despite being a non-performer, Keith Reid was an essential component of Procol Harum, the band he helped found with Gary Brooker in 1967. Reid's poetic, often elliptical lyrics were mirrored in the band's musical ambition, from "A Whiter Shade Of Pale" to "In Held 'Twas In I". He later co-wrote John Farnham's "You're The Voice".

BARRY HUMPHRIES

Aka Dame Edna

(1934–2023)

The Australian comedian, actor and writer emerged from London's comedy scene of the '60s, before refining his most brilliant satirical creation, Dame Edna Everage. Initially conceived as a suburban housewife, she came to represent the gaudy egocentricity of fame. His other major character was lecherous cultural attaché Sir Les Patterson.

IAN BAIRNSON

Bush/Parsons guitarist

(1953–2023)

Versatile guitarist Ian Bairnson quit Scottish rockers Pilot for The Alan Parsons Project in the mid '70s. His tenure lasted until the latter's dissolution in 1990, though he reunited with Parsons on 2019's *The Secret*. Bairnson also played on four early Kate Bush albums, including the sublime solo on "Wuthering Heights".

TOM LEADON

Tom Petty compadre

(1952–2023)

The guitarist was just 14 when he joined Tom Petty in The Epics, with the Gainesville band mutating into Mudcrutch by 1970. Two years later, he followed older brother Bernie to California, where he played with Linda Ronstadt and country-rockers Silver. In 2007 he reunited with Mudcrutch, featuring on two albums.

LASSE WELLANDER

Abba guitarist

(1952–2023)

Lasse Wellander joined Abba as a session player in October 1974. He subsequently became the group's

ROBERTA BAYLEY/REDFERNS

AHMAD JAMAL

Groundbreaking jazz pianist

(1930–2023)

AHMAD Jamal was something of an outlier in improvised jazz circles. A virtuoso pianist who rejected the turbulent complexity of bebop, he preferred instead to accentuate the silence between notes, placing emphasis on texture, rhythm and extended vamps. Writing in his autobiography, Miles Davis declared, "All my inspiration comes from Ahmad Jamal... He knocked me out with his concept of space, his lightness of touch, his understatement, and the way he phrases notes and chords and passages." Jamal's influence also extended to fellow admirers like Herbie Hancock and McCoy Tyner.

Born in Pittsburgh as Frederick Jones, Jamal was a proficient player aged three, taking up formal piano studies four years later. His diverse interests – from Bach and Liszt to Art Tatum and Earl Hines – fostered a broad approach to his art, dismissing the term jazz in favour of what he called "American classical music". Having converted to Islam and changed his name in 1950, Jamal began leading his Three Strings trio soon after. His first landmark release, 1958's *At The Pershing: But Not For Me* – recorded live in Chicago with bassist Israel Crosby and drummer Vernel Fournier – spent over two years on the *Billboard* chart. It showcased Jamal's ability to invest a minimal set-up with the feel of big band orchestration, exemplified by his epic arrangement of jazz standard, "Poinciana".

He continued to make albums for Argo and Cadet throughout the '60s, gradually incorporating electric piano as he entered the following decade. Jamal's instrumental version of "Suicide Is Painless" featured on a reissued *M*A*S*H* soundtrack, while various '70s tracks were later sampled by Nas, De La Soul, Gang Starr and Common, among many others. Awarded an NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship in 1994, Jamal toured and recorded deep into his eighties, signing off with 2019's *Ballades*.

Miles' mentor: Ahmad Jamal in the 1980s

main guitarist, both in the studio and on tour. Wellander recorded seven solo albums and worked on various post-Abba projects with Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson, including *Chess* and the *Mamma Mia!* soundtracks.

IVAN CONTI

Azymuth rhythm king

(1946–2023)

Brazilian drummer and percussionist Ivan 'Mamão' Conti co-founded jazz-funk trio Azymuth in 1973, fusing elements of bossa nova, samba, psychedelia, folk and dance music during their tenure on the Milestone label. Conti also cut a handful of solo albums and, in 2008, collaborated with hip-hop producer Madlib on *Sujinho*.

NORA FORSTER

Punk matriarch

(1942–2023)

Heiress to a wealthy German publishing house, Nora Forster started out as a music promoter in Munich. She later moved to London, becoming, in Vivien Goldman's words, "a den mother to all the young punks", among them her daughter Ari Up of The Slits. Forster married John Lydon in 1979.

JAH SHAKA

Dub warrior

(c1950–2023)

Dub reggae trailblazer Jah Shaka, aka Zulu Warrior, became renowned for his South London sound system during the '70s, drawing huge crowds and influencing the likes of John Lydon and The Slits. He ran his own label and issued albums under the Commandments Of Dub umbrella.

MARK SHEEHAN

The Script co-founder

(1976–2023)

Lead guitarist Mark Sheehan and singer/keyboardist Danny O'Donoghue were members of boyband Mytown prior to forming The Script in 2001. The Irish pop-rock outfit released six big-selling studio albums and scored several major hits, including "The Man Who Can't Be Moved" and "Hall Of Fame".

VIVIAN TRIMBLE

Luscious Jackson keyboardist

(1963–2023)

Formed in 1991 by Jill Cunniff, Gabby Glaser and Vivian Trimble, New York alt.rockers Luscious Jackson released two studio albums prior to Trimble's departure seven years later. She briefly recorded as Kostars (alongside Cunniff) and as Dusty Trails with Josephine Wiggs.

KARL BERGER

German avant-jazzer

(1935–2023)

Free jazz pianist Karl Berger appeared on Don Cherry's *Togetherness* and *Symphony For Improvisers* before recording his debut as band leader in 1967. Co-founder of Woodstock's Creative Music Studio, alongside Ornette Coleman, Berger's numerous credits include playing with John McLaughlin, Bill Laswell, Jeff Buckley and Carla Bley.

JOHN REGAN

Frampton sideman

(1951–2023)

Bassist John Regan enjoyed a long association with Peter Frampton, both live and on record, beginning with 1980's *Rise Up*. His other main collaborator was Ace Frehley, playing with the ex-Kiss guitarist in Frehley's Comet from 1984-90. Regan's various session credits include Bowie and Jagger's Live Aid single, "Dancing In The Street".

GUY BAILEY

Quireboys co-founder

(DOB UNKNOWN–2023)

Guitarist Guy Bailey and frontman Jonathan Gray (aka 'Spike') formed The Quireboys in 1984, the pair serving as core songwriters on big-selling debut *A Bit Of What You Fancy*. They split in 1993, though Bailey and Spike recently reunited for new Quireboys material.

CLIFF FISH

Paper Lace mainstay

(1949–2023)

Bassist Cliff Fish and his Paper Lace bandmates came to prominence on TV talent show *Opportunity Knocks*, topping the UK charts soon after with 1974's "Billy Don't Be A Hero". They followed up with an international success, "The Night Chicago Died".

APRIL STEVENS

"Deep Purple" singer

(1929–2023)

April Stevens enjoyed solo hits like "I'm In Love Again" and "Gimme A Little Kiss, Will Ya, Huh?" at the turn of the '50s, but was better known for her work with younger brother, Nino Tempo. 1963's million-selling "Deep Purple" topped the *Billboard* charts and earned the duo a Grammy.

OTIS REDDING III

Son of Otis

(1964–2023)

Guitarist Otis Redding III (guitar) formed The Reddings with his brother Dexter (bass) and lead vocalist and drummer Mark Lockett, hitting the US R&B charts with "Remote Control" in 1980. A version of "Sittin' On The Dock Of The Bay" paid tribute to the Reddings' late father.

ANDREW LAING

Cockney Rejects drummer

(DOB UNKNOWN–2023)

Beginning in 1999, drummer Andrew Laing's tenure with Cockney Rejects initially lasted only a year. He returned in 2007 for a decade-long spell that produced *Unforgiven* and *East End Babylon*. Laing also played with Leatherface, Red Alert and Angelic Upstarts.

BOB HEATLIE

1980s hitmaker

(1946–2023)

Scottish songwriter and producer Bob Heatlie took Mary Sandeman, aka Aneka, to the top of the UK charts with 1981's "Japanese Boy". But he was better known for his long association with Shakin' Stevens, particularly "Cry Just A Little Bit" and "Merry Christmas Everyone".

EDWARD 'KIDD' JORDAN

Jazz saxophonist

(1935–2023)

Music professor at the Southern University of New Orleans for over 30 years, 'Kidd' Jordan started out backing Ray Charles, Guitar Slim and Big Joe Turner during the '50s. Among his former students were Wynton and Branford Marsalis.

ROB HUGHES

LEON MORRIS/REDFERNS

FEEDBACK

Email letters@uncut.co.uk.
Or tweet us at twitter.com/uncutmagazine

BOB AND THE BEATLE

In Jim Keltner's tribute to George Harrison [*Take 313*] there's a reference to the video of the Traveling Wilburys' "End Of The Line", which was directed by my friend Will McLellan – aka Willy Smax. Roy Orbison had died shortly before the shoot. Will got round this by featuring an empty rocking chair with a guitar on it, in Roy Orbison's place. What was harder for Will, however, was that whenever he turned the camera on Bob Dylan, Dylan would respond by "goofing up", as Will puts it, making all the footage of him unusable. Will put this to him during a break in filming. Dylan told him, "Oh, no-one will want to see me – this is George's band!" So Will had to assure him, "There are people all over the world who'll want to see you in the video!" According to Will, Dylan gave a shy smile and said, "Really?"

In another break, Dylan went over to a group of kids hanging around outside the studio. He pointed to a window and said, "Look – that's George Harrison!" One of the kids looked at Dylan, perplexed, and said, "Yeah – but you're Bob Dylan!"

Will's reminiscences have coloured the way I've regarded Bob Dylan ever since. I see him primarily as someone who just loves making music and working with musicians he respects, but who doesn't know quite how to respond to the adulation he's attracted for almost his entire career. ***Ed Fenton, Oxford***

That's lovely, Ed. Some great insights there from your pal, Will. [MB]

NATIONAL TREASURE

Well done for putting The National on the June cover, *Uncut*! I was fortunate enough to discover the band through an *Uncut* CD – "Lit Up" on a Best Of 2005 compilation – and have been a huge fan ever since. I've followed their progress through the pages of *Uncut* – always such intuitive and understanding pieces, but I thought Laura Barton's cover story was the best piece of writing I've read about them in *Uncut*, and possibly anywhere else. She's been a great addition to your writing team and she really went the extra mile with this piece. Thanks again!

Susan Speller, Maidstone

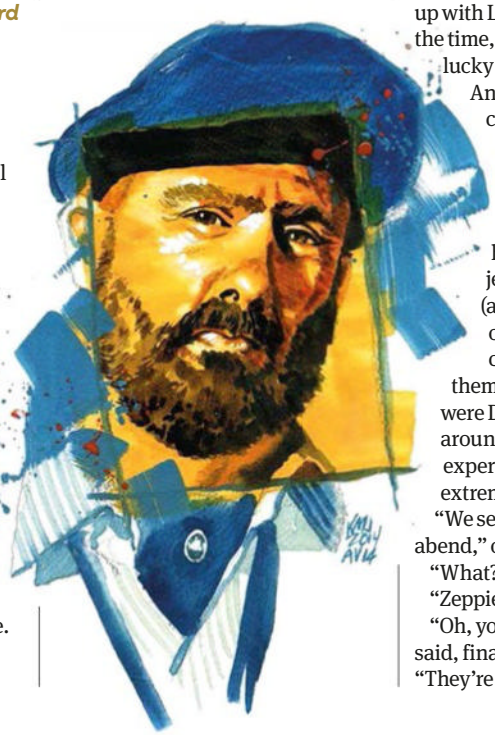
Harrison and Dylan at the 1988 Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame awards ceremony, NYC, Jan 20, 1988

MARK OF RESPECT

Thank you so much for the Mark Eitzel feature in Take 311. Ever since *Mercury* [*1993*] I have been the biggest Eitzel fan... I just wish Mark himself had a fraction of the respect for his work that I and many others do. Contrary to Mr E's assertion, his best work would fill 20 EPs! But, reading the article, it seems he might be at his happiest now... and that is all that really matters!

I attach a small portrait I did of Mark a few years ago (below) for your (hopeful) pleasure.

Ken Meyer Jr, Santa Ana, CA



LSD ZEPPELIN

As a longtime reader and subscriber for over 25 years from my initial discovery while living in Harrogate, I want to thank you for another remembrance of what were wonderful teenage years growing up with Led Zeppelin [*Take 311*]. At the time, we didn't realise how lucky we were living in the Los Angeles area, with Led Zep coming through, it seemed, several times a year.

A year earlier in 1972, on one of our first driving adventures, we saw two hitchhikers, long hair, jeans, strange low-cut boots (a little different for LA), and odd pullover shirts. We felt compelled to stop and pick them up. They told us they were Deutsche and travelling around the United States. Our experience with Europeans was extremely limited.

"We seeing lead zeppieline heute abend," one of them said.

"What?" I asked.

"Zeppieline," they said in unison.

"Oh, you mean Led Zeppelin?" I said, finally understanding.

"They're playing tonight at the Forum, right?" I was going to see them the next evening in Long Beach. We were miles from the Los Angeles Forum. It was already about 6pm. No way they were going to make it thumbing from where we were, now cruising down Sepulveda Blvd in Venice.

"Do you guys know where the Los Angeles Forum is from here?" Scott, my friend and driver asked.

I glanced back and saw them shake their heads and start giggling, which then transformed into somewhat maniacal, but genuine laughter.

"Do you know where you are now?" I asked.

Their response was the same. Scott and I looked at each other and shook our heads. We were both wondering what was going on with them. I looked back again.

"Where did you start today? What city or place?" I asked. I noticed at this point their eyes were seemingly enlarged, wide open, and opaque.

"Are you acidtized," one of them said.

"Wait. What?" I asked. I looked back at Scott, but he didn't seem to catch it either. Suddenly I saw him smile, and at the same time I got it also.

"We are both acidtized," they said enthusiastically.

"You're on LSD?" I shot back at them.

"Ja, we are acidtized," one said and they both started laughing again.

Scott and I had a quick conference on what to do.

"We can't just drop them off in Culver City..." I started to say.

"No, no, we can't do that, they'll never make the show," Scott agreed.

We were still young enough and free from responsibilities, so we felt at that moment in our life we would always have unlimited possibilities and it purely seemed like the right thing to do. We drove them to Inglewood, dropped them off at a near corner in a massive crowd of kids moving toward the Los Angeles Forum and Lead Zeppaline; many of whom were probably acidtized.

Brant Vickers, Green Valley, Arizona

Brilliant story, Brant! Thanks for sharing it with us. Talking of acidtized, I hope you enjoy our excellent Julian Cope interview on page 50; plenty of that kind of thing going on there.

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS

POP ART GENIUS

Rick Griffin did indeed create some masterly album covers [*see Feedback, Take 313*], but I was put in mind of Van Dyke Parkes, who painted the superb cover for Little Feat's *Sailin' Shoes* (the picture adorned my 50th-birthday cake) and the equally beguiling *Feats Don't Fail Me Now*.

Not only Pop Art genius, but each picture is a wonderful summary of those records' sorcerous, humorous secrets.

For all the great covers from The Beatles to Talking Heads, these two stand the test of time and are above and beyond all others.

Marilyn Monroe and George Washington crossing a lighting-flecked mountain range in a Volkswagen. What's not to love and cherish?

DC Kneath, Swansea

TONY HILL RIP

I thought that your section on departures should mark the death of Tony Hill (c1943 – December 8, 2022). He was guitarist in The Misunderstood during their *Before The Dream Faded* period and was also very briefly part of Turquoise with David Bowie and Hermione Farthingale.

Hill subsequently formed psych-rockers High Tide, including Simon House (later Hawkwind/Bowie) on violin. They made two albums, the first being the relentlessly heavy *Sea Shanties*, and an eponymous second, which to my mind was much better, with some folkier strands and subtler arrangements. They moved down to Puddletown in Dorset and duly fried their brains alongside Arthur Brown and others.

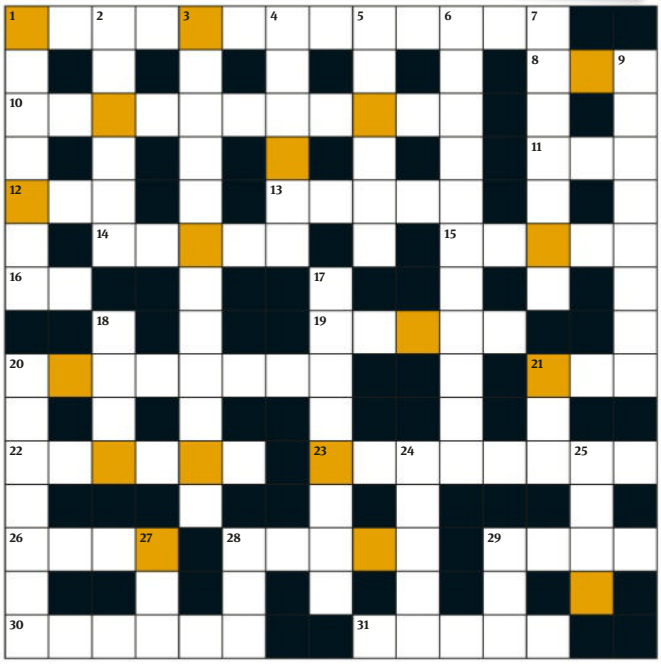
The drummer Roger Hadden had an LSD-related breakdown – I believe he is still in a hospital somewhere – and High Tide didn't last long. Hill then teamed up with Drachen Theaker and made a series of demos and jams which were released sporadically over the years. I am told he suffered from tremendous drug-induced mental problems for many years but returned to make a fine solo album called *Inexactness* with The Bevis Frond and others.

I was introduced to High Tide aged about 12 and it pretty much changed my whole approach to music. I think he should be remembered and celebrated.

Nick Brown, via email

WIN! CROSSWORD

One copy of Brigid Mae Power's *Dream From The Deep Well*



HOW TO ENTER

The letters in the shaded squares form an anagram of a song by Nick Drake. When you've worked out what it is, email your answer to: *competitions@uncut.co.uk*. The first correct entry picked at random will win a prize. Closing date: **Wednesday, June 7, 2023**. This competition is only open to European residents.

CLUES ACROSS

1 The Strokes' debut single is a mystery, just as their next seven singles were, only being hits in the UK and not their native US (4-2-7)
8 (See 14 across)
10 A spellbinding mixture of music on album from The Black Keys (5-6)
11 (See 7 down)
12+17D The Kings Of Leon employ a person for one of their recordings (3-8)
13 Indie record label _____ Wonder that introduced The Cure and Bauhaus (5)
14+8A And finally a song from Blur (2-3-3)
15 (See 18 down)
16 Indie record label __ Discs that introduced Billy Bragg and Paul Weller (2)
19+25D Echo And The Bunnymen's downfall while all at sea (5-4)
20 Hated REM arrangement on alt-J album (3-5)
21 A bit of a challenge to find name of a Dublin-based indie band (3)
22 Stiltskin's debut single that didn't come out? (6)
23 Alt.rock band featuring twin sisters Kim and Kelley Deal (8)
26 *"He's not selling any alibis as you stare into the vacuum of his____"*, from Bob Dylan's "Like A Rolling Stone" (4)
28 Reef album often played at fairgrounds? (5)
29 *"So you think you can tell heaven from hell, blue skies from____?"* from Pink Floyd's "Wish You Were Here" (4)
30 (See 5 down)
31 US band who had '70s No 1 hit with "Kiss You All Over" (5)

CLUES DOWN

1 *"You'd better take off your_____, 'cause your overcoat is too long"*, 1967 (7)
2 *"Maybe I've forgotten the name and address of everyone I've ever known"*, 1993 (6)
3 John Lennon described this song as "one of the earliest heavy metal records made" (6-2-4)
4 1968 hit that was covered in 1986 by The Damned (6)
5+30A Band who were the winners of the inaugural Mercury Music Prize in 1992 (6-6)
6 Learn any old arrangement on Pink Floyd's debut single (6-5)
7+8A Dry Cleaning, latest fashion trousers adjusted (3-4-3)
9 Pixies album with verses in irregular rhythm and rhyme (8)
17 (See 12 across)
18+15A Laila Biali's decent version of a David Bowie number (4-5)
20 *"The_____ ain't healthy, he don't give a damn"*, but did "Sheriff Fatman" give a shit? (7)
21 Scottish duo ___ And Cry who had '80s hit with "Labour Of Love" (3)
24 Madness expect to include an album by Alison Moyet (5)
25 (See 19 across)
27 *"I'll name him Frank or George or Bill or Tom, anything but___"*, line from a certain Johnny Cash song (3)
28 A forceful hit album from Paul McCartney (3)
29 Happily includes a band formed in 1978 (1-1-1)

ANSWERS: TAKE 312

ACROSS
1+9A+17D Down In The Tube Station At Midnight, **10+12A** Alone Again Or, **11** Meek, **13** Id, **15** Fat, **16+23A** Arnold Layne, **17** Moist, **18** Everett, **20** Diner, **21** Hyena, **25** If I Was, **27** Otherness, **29** Hut, **30** Hero, **32** A-ha

DOWN
1+31A Dust My Broom, **2** We Are Scientists, **3** Iris, **4** Tonight, **5** Extricate, **6+8D** Up Around The Bend, **7** Eloy, **13** I'm Down, **14** Aftermath, **19** Re-act-or, **22** Eureka, **24** Nye, **26** Asia, **27** Orb, **28** REM

HIDDEN ANSWER: "Solsbury Hill"

XWORD COMPILED BY: Trevor Hungerford

UNCUT

JULY 2023

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Susanna Hoffs

The Bangles frontwoman on the records that lit her eternal flame: "I always think of music as my drug"

DIONNE WARWICK
Dionne Warwick's Golden Hits Part 2
SCEPTER, 1969

When I was growing up, my mother played Dionne Warwick singing Burt Bacharach and Hal David songs on repeat. So for the little girl who loved to sing, the roadmaps of these songs are so important. The melodies are truly extraordinary, the lyrics are so clever and specific, and the delivery is so imbued with heartache, joy, sadness, every possible emotion. It's a rare synergy between Bert and Hal and Dionne Warwick. Obviously their songs were covered by other people as well, but her voice specifically – the yearning, the vocal tone... and this was likely a one-take performance, with none of the digital, magical things that people do now. Just thinking about that when I sing along to this record, it is extraordinary.

THE BEATLES
Help! PARLOPHONE, 1965

As a little kid, I saw the movie *Help!* and that's how I became obsessed with The Beatles. There's a funny scene in it where Paul McCartney gets shrunk. He's naked, and he has to put on a chewing gum wrapper to cover his nakedness. That was really profound as a very young Beatles fan, I was very titillated by that. And I liked the way that their individual personas came through [*on this album*]. I started to realise there was a distinction between John's personality and Paul's personality in particular: Paul was singing about sex, John was singing about heartbreak and loneliness, and George had a more philosophical bent to his approach somehow. And Ringo was just Ringo, being happy!

JONI MITCHELL
Blue REPRISE, 1971

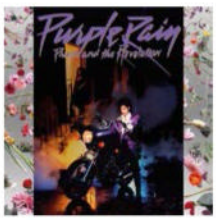
To my family's chagrin, I would sing along and try to mimic every swoop and growl and flutey top part. Joni's ability to emote vocally, I really studied how she did it by training myself to copy her moves. She was really instrumental for me, not only as a writer but as a singer and performer and guitarist and everything. There's an utterly confessional aspect to her writing, and she's a master storyteller. That's not an easy thing to do. Even as a young woman, her lyrics were incredibly sophisticated and her melodies were channelling the emotion – it was in a whole 'nother universe to the usual songwriting formula. So I learned a lot from Joni Mitchell's records. *Blue* is a work of art, the whole package.

THE ROLLING STONES
Let It Bleed DECCA, 1969

I'll try to remember how I got past The Beatles to the Stones...! I was kind of a late bloomer, quite shy. But during the summer between graduating high school and before I went to university, I had my first romantic experience, with a guitar player who was really into the Stones. I was so much into The Beatles that it was an awakening, because the Stones are a little messier and a little more off the rails. George Martin's production is so crafted, he was the consummate arranger, whereas with the Stones you feel like you're in the studio with them. And I love those differences in record-making.

THE VELVET UNDERGROUND & NICO
The Velvet Underground & Nico
VERVE, 1967

It was a call to action for me in those early days when I was collaborating with David Roback, who went on to do Mazzy Star. We were art students together at UC Berkeley. So that album revolutionised my whole thinking about being an artist, being a musician, because it encompasses so many aspects: the performance art aspect to those early Velvet Underground shows, and the fact that Andy Warhol was involved. I love Nico, I love the haunting quality of her singing. And I love the guitar solos – the solo on "Sunday Morning" is so amazing. Yeah, I just revere that album.



PRINCE AND THE REVOLUTION
Purple Rain WARNER BROS, 1984

I wasn't familiar with Prince until the *Purple Rain* album came out. I recall hearing "When Doves Cry" on the radio right around the time that word got to me that Prince really liked The Bangles. It was just astounding to me, the synergy of that moment. I went on to absorb *Purple Rain* in its entirety and I was transfixed by all of it – the sheer emotion, the songwriting, the everything. It's an utter masterpiece. Prince was an iconoclast; he was cheeky and mysterious, but also very joyful. As a person, he was sly but enchanting. He was one of those special humans, and I'm so grateful that he gave us the extraordinary gift of "Manic Monday".

BOB DYLAN
Highway 61 Revisited COLUMBIA, 1965

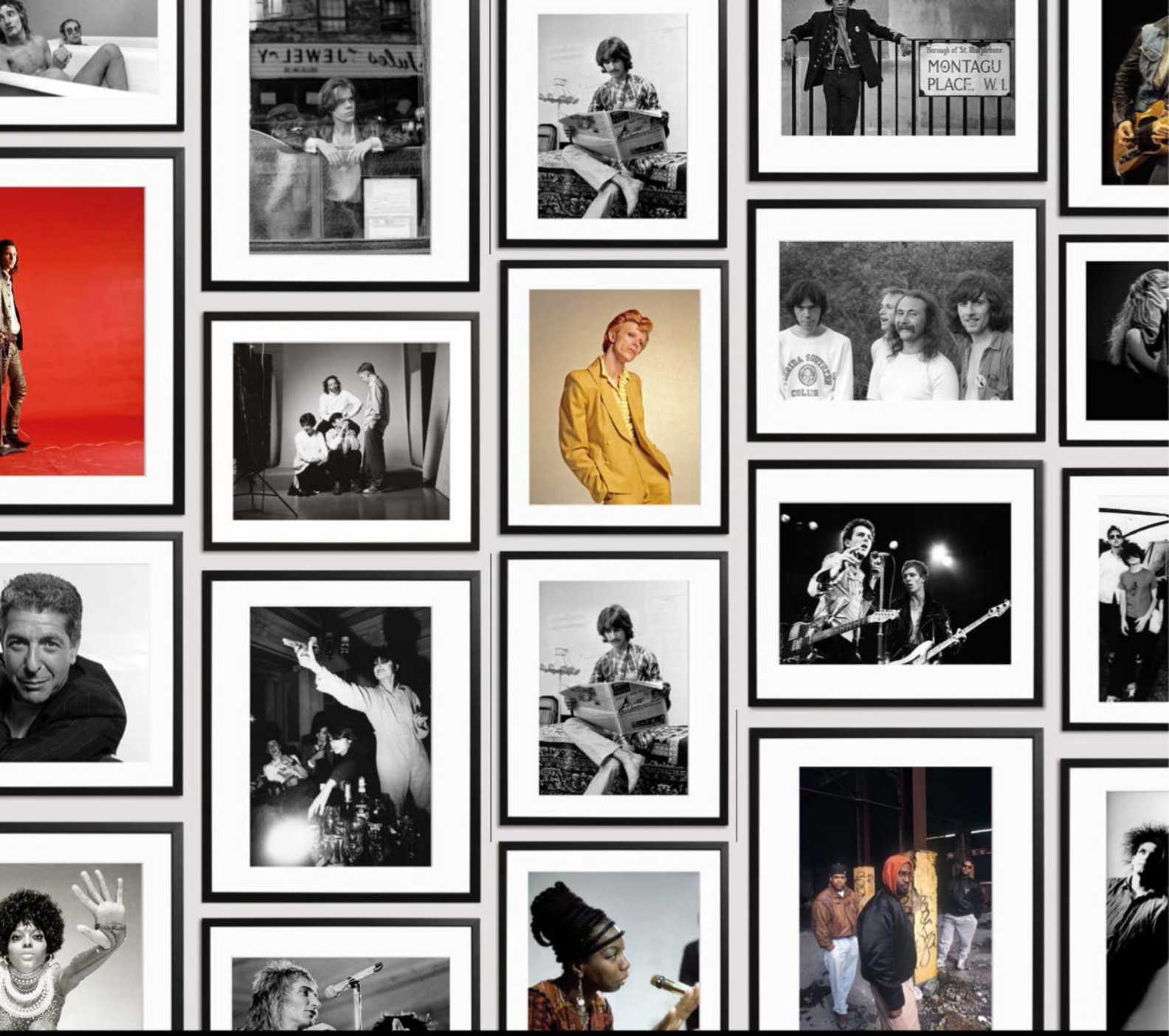
Wow, how cool is that cover? The motorcycle T-shirt, the guy with the camera and the striped shirt standing behind him, it's like something William Eggleston would have taken. It's such a cohesive album – I'm guessing that it was recorded with the same people in a discrete amount of time. The arrangements are so natural and you feel like you're in the room with the musicians. In particular, I want to call out the song "It Takes A Lot To Laugh, It Takes A Train To Cry". I love that song, and people don't talk about it enough. It just speaks to me in a uniquely wonderful way. I love the melody and I'm always singing my own harmony. Maybe I should cover it with Matthew Sweet and do my harmony?

SLY & THE FAMILY STONE
Dynamite! The Collection SONY, 2011

I just love Sly & The Family Stone. I love all the voices, the songwriting, the arrangements, I love that you cannot stop yourself from moving or dancing or at least tapping your foot. Sometimes you can be in a very dark place – you put on music, and like magic, you're moving your hips, you're singing, you're dancing, you're uplifted. Their music works that way. There's no way that those musicians weren't having a blast [*in the studio*] and it's like they bottled the joy and they bottled the energy. I always think of music as my drug: if you're down, it'll just snap you right out of it.

Susanna Hoffs' new covers album The Deep End is out now on Baroque Folk Records

INTERVIEW: SAM RICHARDS. PHOTO: SHERVIN LAINEZ



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